

"This is the Voice of the Teacher. It roars and caresses. It roars when it is addressed to those who do not want to be converted. It caresses when it speaks to those who, though imperfect, have the 'good will' to find God and his Word and, having found Them, to sanctify themselves. For these it becomes the caress of a Friend and the blessing of Jesus."

Sea of Galilee

Dead Sea

Maria Valtorta

"The Gospel As Revealed To Me"

THE POEM OF THE MAN†GOD

VOL 3

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275. Avarice and the Foolish Rich Man.

10th and 14th September 1945.

Jesus is on one of the hills on the western coast of the lake. The towns and villages spread on both shores are displayed under His eyes. Directly under the hill are Magdala and Tiberias, the former with its luxurious district strewn with gardens, clearly separated from the poor houses of fishermen, peasants and common people by a little torrent now completely dry; the latter magnificent in every quarter, a town unaware of misery and decay, looking beautiful and fresh in the sunshine before the lake. Between the two towns there are a few but well kept vegetable-gardens on the short plain, while olive-trees climb the hill conquering it. From this hill-top one can see behind Jesus the saddles of the Mount of Beatitudes, at the foot of which there is the main road which goes from the Mediterranean Sea to Tiberias. Perhaps Jesus has chosen this place because it is so close to a very busy road, and thus people can come here from many towns both on the lake and in the inland of Galilee, and then go back home in the evening or find hospitality in many of the towns. The climate is also mild because of the height and also because the tall trees on the upper slopes have replaced the olive-trees.

There are in fact many people besides the apostles and disciples. People who need Jesus for health reasons, or for advice, people who have come out of curiosity, or led by friends or in a spirit of imitation. In brief, there is a large crowd. The season, which is no longer hot but tends to the languid pleasantness of autumn, encourages pilgrims to come in search of the Master. Jesus has cured sick people and has spoken to the crowd on the subject of wealth unjustly attained and detachment there from, as is necessary in everyone who wishes to gain Heaven and is essential in those who want to be His disciples. He is now replying to the questions of this or that rich disciple, who is somewhat upset by such requirement.

John, the scribe, says: «Must I destroy what I have, thus depriving my family of what is due to them?»

«No. God gave you some property. Let it be useful to Justice and make just use of it. That is, assist your family by means of it, which is your duty; treat your servants humanely, and that is charity; help the poor, and the poor disciples in need. Your wealth thus will not be a hindrance, but an aid.»

Then addressing the crowds He says: «I solemnly tell you that also the poorest disciple can be in the same danger of losing Heaven through attachment to riches, if he acts against justice by coming to terms with rich people, after he has become a priest of Mine. A rich or wicked man will often endeavour to seduce you with gifts to make you agreeable to his way of living and to his sin. And among My ministers there will be some who will yield to the temptation of presents. That must not happen. Follow the Baptist's example. Although he was not a judge or a magistrate, he possessed the perfection of judge and magistrate as pointed out in Deuteronomy: “You must be impartial, you must take no bribes, for a bribe blinds wise men's eyes and jeopardises the cause of the just.” Too often man allows the edge of the sword of justice to be blunted by the gold which a sinner rubs on it. No, that must not happen. Learn how to be poor, how to die, but never come to terms with sin. Not even with the excuse of using that gold for the poor. It is cursed gold and would bear no good. It is the gold of a disgraceful compromise. You have been appointed masters that you may be masters, doctors and redeemers. What would you be, if your own interest led you to agree to wickedness? Masters of evil science, doctors who kill their patients, not redeemers but parties to the ruin of hearts.»

One of the crowd comes forward and says: «I am not a disciple. But I do admire You. Answer this question of mine: “Is it lawful to keep the money of another person?”»

«No, man. It is larceny, like robbing the purse of a passer-by.»

«Even if it is family money?»

«Of course. It is not right that one should take possession of the money belonging to all the others.»

«Then come to Abelmaim, Master, on the road to Damascus, and order my brother to share with me the inheritance of our father who died without leaving a written will. He took everything for himself. And remember that we are twins, born at the first and only birth. So I have the same rights as he has.»

Jesus looks at him and says: «It is a painful situation and your brother is certainly not behaving righteously. But all I can do is to pray for you and for him, that he may change, and I can come to your village and evangelize and thus touch his heart. The road is no burden to Me if I can bring about peace between you.»

The man becomes furious and bursts out: «What's the use of Your words? It takes much more than that in this case!»

«Did you not tell Me to order your brother to...»

«To order is not to evangelize. An order is always joined to a threat. Threaten to strike his person, if he does not give me what is due to me. You can do that. As You give health You can give a disease.»

«Man, I came to convert, not to strike. But if you have faith in My words, you will have peace.»

«Which words?»

«I told you that I will pray for you and for your brother, that you may be comforted and he may be converted.»

«Nonsense! I am not such a fool as to believe that. Come and order.»

Jesus, Who has been meek and patient, becomes impressive and severe. He straightens up – before He was bending over the little stout angry man – and He says: «Man, who appointed Me judge or arbitrator between you? Nobody. But to avoid a rupture between two brothers I was willing to come and practise My mission of conciliator and redeemer, and if you had believed My words, on going back to Abelmaim you would have found your brother already changed. But you will not believe. And you will have no miracle. If you had been able to get hold of the treasure before your brother, you would have kept it, depriving your brother of it, because as it is true that you were born twins, it is also true that you have twin passions and both you and your brother have but one love: gold, and one faith: gold. Be therefore with your faith. Goodbye.»

The man goes away cursing Jesus while all the people present are scandalised and would like to punish him.

But Jesus objects saying: «Let him go. Why dirty your hands striking a brute? I forgive him because he is possessed and led astray by the demon of gold. Forgive him as well. Let us rather pray for the unhappy man so that he may become humane again with a beautiful free soul.»

«That is true. Even his countenance was dreadful because of his greed. Did you notice it?» the disciples and those who were close to the miser ask one another.

«That is true, indeed! He did not look the same person as before.»

«Yes. And when he rejected the Master, he almost struck Him while cursing Him, and his countenance was demoniac.»

«A tempting demon. He wanted to lead the Master to wickedness...»

«Listen» says Jesus. «It is true that the alterations of the spirit are reflected on one's face. It is as if the demon appeared on the surface of his possession. Only few people who are demons, either in deeds or appearance, do not disclose what they are. And those few are perfect in evil and perfectly possessed. The countenance of a just man, instead, is always beautiful, even if his face is materially disfigured, because of a supernatural beauty, which from the interior exudes exteriorly. And it is not just a saying, but a real fact, that we notice a bodily freshness as well in those who are free from vices. The soul within us envelops our whole being. The stench of a corrupt soul affects also the body, whereas the scent of a pure soul preserves it. A corrupt soul drives the flesh to obscene sins, which age and disfigure the body. A pure soul incites the body to a pure life, which grants a fresh complexion and imparts majesty.

Endeavour to keep your youth spiritually pure, or to revive it, if you have already lost it, and beware of greed, both for sensual pleasures and for power. The life of man does not depend on the abundance of his wealth, neither in present life and much less in the next one, eternal life. It depends instead on his way of living, as well as his happiness, both on the earth and in Heaven. Because a vicious man is never really happy. On the contrary, a virtuous man is always happy with a celestial joy, even if he is poor and alone. Not even death upsets him. Because he has no sins or remorse making him fear to meet God, neither does he regret what he leaves on the earth. He knows that his treasure is in Heaven and like a man who goes to take the inheritance due to him, a holy inheritance, he goes happily and solicitously towards death, which opens to him the gate of the Kingdom where is his treasure.

Store up your treasure at once. Begin in your youth, you young people; work incessantly, you older people, who are closer to death because of your age. But since the date of death is unknown, and a child often dies before a venerable old man, do not postpone the work of storing up your treasure of virtues and good deeds for the next life, lest death should reach you before you have placed a treasure of merits in Heaven. Many people say: “Oh! I am young and strong! I will enjoy myself for the time being on the earth, and I will turn later.” A big mistake!

Listen to this parable. A rich man's estate had yielded a good harvest. A really miraculous harvest. He looks happily at so much abundance piling up in his fields and threshing-floors and which is to be stored in provisional sheds and even in the rooms of his house, since his barns cannot hold it all, and says: 'I have worked like a slave but I have not been disappointed by my fields. I have worked as much as for ten harvests, and I am going to rest just as long. What shall I do to put away all this crop? I do not want to sell it otherwise I would be compelled to work to have a new crop next year. This is what I will do: I will knock down my granaries and build larger ones, capable of holding all my crops and my goods. And then I will say to my soul: 'Oh, my soul! You have aside goods for many years. Rest, therefore, eat, drink and have a good time.'” The man, like many more people, mistook his soul for his body and mixed the sacred and the profane, because in actual fact *a soul does not rejoice in revelries and idleness, but languishes*. And the man, like many, after the first good harvest in the fields of virtue, stopped, as he thought he had done everything.

But do you not know that once you have laid your hand on the plough you must persevere for one, ten, one hundred years, as long as your life lasts, because to stop is a crime against oneself, as one denies oneself a greater glory, and it is a regression, because generally he who stops not only does not proceed further, but turns back? The treasure of Heaven must increase year by year to be good.

Because if Mercy is benign to those also who had few years to store it up, it will not be an accomplice of lazy people who in a long life do little. It is a treasure increasing continuously. Otherwise it is no longer a fruit-bearing treasure, but an unfruitful one, which is detrimental to the readily available peace of Heaven.

God said to the foolish man: “Fool! You mistake body and wealth of the earth for what is spirit and you turn the grace of God into evil. This very night the demand will be made for your soul, and it will be taken away and your body will lie lifeless. And this hoard of yours, whose will it be then? Will you take it with you? No. You will come to My presence despoiled of earthly crops and spiritual works and you will be poor in the next life. It would have been better if you had used your crops for works of mercy on behalf of your neighbour and yourself. Because if you had been merciful towards others, you would have been merciful to your own soul. And instead of fostering idle thoughts, you could have plied a trade which would have given an honest profit for your body and great merit for your soul until I called you.” And the man died that night and was severely judged. I tell you solemnly that that happens to those who store up treasure for

themselves but do not grow rich in the eyes of God.

Go now and avail yourselves of the doctrine explained to you. Peace be with you.» And Jesus blesses and withdraws into a thicket with His apostles and disciples to take some food and rest. And while eating He continues to speak on the same lesson, repeating a subject already explained several times to the apostles and which I think will never be clarified enough, because man is too easily seized with foolish fears.

«You must believe» He says, «that man should worry only about making himself rich in virtue. But mind you: you must not worry anxiously or painfully. Good is the enemy of anxiety, of fears, of haste, which still show too many traces of avarice, jealousy and human mistrust. Let your work be constant, confident, peaceful, without rough starts and stops, as onagers do. But no one makes use of them, unless one is mad, to go on a safe journey. Be peaceful in victory and peaceful in defeat. Also tears shed for an error you made and which grieves you because by it you have displeased God, must be peaceful, comforted by humility and trust. Prostration, anger against oneself are always a symptom of pride and lack of confidence. He who is humble knows that he is a poor man subject to the miseries of the flesh, which at times triumphs. He who is humble puts his trust not so much in himself as in God, and is serene also when defeated and says: “Forgive me, Father. I know that You are aware of my weakness which overwhelms me at times. I will believe that You pity me. I am fully confident that You will help me in future even more than heretofore, notwithstanding I please You so little.” Do not be indifferent or avaricious with regard to the gifts of God. Give generously what you possess of wisdom and virtue.

Be active in spiritual matters as men are with regard to their bodies. And as far as your bodies are concerned do not imitate the people of the world who always tremble for their future, fearing they may lack what is superfluous, that they may be taken ill, or die, that enemies may be harmful, and so on. God knows what you are in need of. Therefore be not afraid for your future. Be free from tears, which are heavier than the chains of galley-slaves. Do not be anxious about the necessities of life: what you will eat, or drink and how you will clothe yourself. The life of the spirit is worth more than the life of the body and the body is worth more than clothes, because you live with your bodies and not with your clothes and *through the mortification of your bodies you help your souls to attain eternal life*. God knows how long He will leave your souls in your bodies, and He will give you what is necessary until that hour. He gives it to crows,

impure birds which feed on corpses and the reason for their being is just to remove putrifying corpses. And will He not give you what is necessary? Crows have neither larders nor granaries and God feeds them just the same. You are men, not crows. At present you are the cream of men because you are the disciples of the Master, the evangelizers of the world, the servants of God. And can you possibly think that God may neglect you, even for what concerns your clothes, since He takes care of the lilies of the valleys and makes them grow and clothes them with such beautiful robes that Solomon never possessed the like, and yet they do no work but scent worshipping God? It is true that by yourselves you cannot add one tooth to a toothless mouth, or lengthen by one inch a contracted leg, or make dimmed eyes bright. And if you cannot do such things, can you think you may be able to repel misery and diseases and turn dust into food? You cannot. But *do not be of little faith. You will always have what you need*. Do not worry like the people of the world who strive to satisfy their pleasures. You have your Father Who knows what you need. All you must seek, and it must be your first care, is the Kingdom of God and His justice, and all the rest will be given to you as well.

Be not afraid, My little flock. My Father was pleased to call you to the Kingdom, that you may have His Kingdom. You may, therefore, aspire to it and assist the Father through your good will and holy activity. Sell your property and give the money to charity, if you are alone. Give your relatives means of subsistence as compensation for your abandoning the house to follow Me, because it is unfair to deprive children and wife of their daily bread. And if you cannot sacrifice money, sacrifice the wealth of your affections. They are money which God evaluates for what they are: gold which is purer than any other gold; pearls which are more precious than those taken from the sea, and rubies which are rarer than those found in the bowels of the earth. Because to renounce one's family for My sake is love which is more perfect than the purest gold, it is a pearl made of tears, a ruby made of blood wailing from the wound of one's heart, torn to pieces by the separation from father and mother, wife and children. But such purses never wear out, such treasures never fail. Thieves cannot break into Heaven. Wood-worms cannot eat what is deposited there. And have Heaven in your hearts and your hearts in Heaven near your treasures. Because a heart, whether good or wicked, is with what you consider your dear treasure. So as a heart is there where its treasure is (in Heaven), so the treasure is there where the heart is (within you), nay, the treasure is within the heart and with the treasure of saints, in the heart there is the Heaven of saints.

Be always ready like those who are about to depart or are waiting for their master. You are the servants of the Master-God. He can call you where He is any moment, or come where you are. Be, therefore, always ready to go, or to pay Him homage, with work or travelling belt round your waists and lamps lit in your hands. Coming out of a wedding party with one who has preceded you in Heaven and in being consecrated to God on the earth, God may remember that you are waiting and may say: "Let us go to Stephen or to John, or to James and to Peter." And God is fast in coming or saying: "Come." So be ready to open the door to Him when He arrives or to leave, should He call you.

Blessed are those servants whom the Master finds vigilant on His arrival. I tell you solemnly that to reward them for their faithful waiting, He will gird His waist, make them sit at the table and serve them. He may come at the first, or second or third watch. You do not know, so be always vigilant. And you will be happy if you are so and the Master finds you thus! Do not flatter yourselves by saying: "There is time. He will not come tonight." Evil would befall you. You do not know. If one knew when a thief is going to come, one would not leave the house unguarded so that a robber may force the door and coffers. Be prepared as well, because when you least expect Him, the Son of man will come saying: "It is time."»

Peter, who has even forgotten to finish his food, to listen to the Lord, when he sees that Jesus is silent, asks: «What You said, is it for us or for everybody?»

«It is for you and for everybody. But it is primarily for you, because you are like stewards put by the Master at the head of the servants and it is your duty to be twice as vigilant, both as stewards and as simple believers. What must a steward be like, once he has been put by his master at the head of the servants, so that he may give each his fair portion at the right moment? He must be shrewd and loyal, in order to fulfill his own duty and make his subordinates fulfill theirs. Otherwise the interests of the master would suffer a loss, whereas he pays so that the steward may act on his behalf and safeguard his interests while he is away.

Happy is the servant whom the master finds acting loyally, diligently and honestly, on his returning home. I tell you solemnly that he will appoint his steward over other estates, over all his estates, and will relax and rejoice in his heart because of the reliability of his servant. But if the servant says: "Well! My master is very far away and has written to me that he will be delayed in coming back home. So I can do what I like and I will do the necessary when I think he is

about to come." And he begins to eat and drink until he gets drunk and gives crazy orders and, as the good servants under him refuse to carry them out not to cause damage to their master, he beats servants and maids until they are taken ill and decline. And thinking that he is happy he says: "At last I relish being the master and feared by everybody." But what will happen to him? It will happen that the master will arrive when he least expects him, catching him perhaps in the very act of pocketing money or bribing some of the most unreliable servants. Then, I tell you, the master will throw him out, depriving him of his position as steward, and refusing to keep him among his servants, because it is not right to keep unfaithful traitors among honest people. And the more the master previously loved and instructed him, the more he will be punished.

Because the more one is aware of the will and mind of the master, the more one is obliged to fulfill it accurately. If one does not act as the master explained in so great detail that nobody else was told so clearly, one will be severely beaten, whereas an inferior servant, who knows little and does wrong while he thinks he is doing right, will receive a less severe punishment. Much will be requested of him who was given much, and he who has much in his care, will have to return much, because My stewards will be asked to give an account also of the soul of a baby one hour old.

My election is not a cool relaxation in a flowery little wood. I came to bring fire on the earth; and what can I wish for but that it may light up? That is why I tire Myself and I want you to tire yourselves until you die and until the whole earth is a celestial bonfire. I am to be baptised with a baptism. And how distressed I will be until it is accomplished! Are you not asking why? Because through it I will be able to make you Fire-bearers, agitators who will act in every and against every social stratum, to make it one thing only: the flock of Christ.

Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? And according to the way of thinking of the earth? No. On the contrary, I came to bring discord and separation. Because from now on, and until the whole world becomes one only flock, of five people in one house two will be against three, and the father will be against his son, and the son against the father, the mother against her daughters and the daughters against the mother and mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law will have a further reason not to understand each other, because a new language will be spoken by some lips, and it will be like Babel, because a deep disturbance will agitate the reign of human and superhuman affections. Then the time will come when everything will be unified in a new

language, spoken by all those who have been saved by the Nazarene, and feelings will be filtered like water, as the dross will sink to the bottom, while the limpid waves of celestial lakes will shine on the surface.

Truly, it is not restful to serve Me, according to the meaning man attaches to that word. Heroism and indefatigability are required. But I tell you that at the end it will be Jesus, still and always Jesus, Who will gird His waist to serve you, and will sit with you at an eternal banquet and all labour and sorrow will be forgotten.

Now, since no one has been looking for us, let us go to the lake. We shall rest at Magdala. In the gardens of Mary of Lazarus there is room for everybody and she has put her house at the disposal of the Pilgrim and His friends. There is no need for Me to tell you that Mary of Magdala died with her sin and she has risen again from her repentance as Mary of Lazarus, the woman disciple of Jesus of Nazareth. You are already aware of that because the news spread like the fury of the wind in a forest. But I will tell you something you do not know: all the personal wealth of Mary is for the servants of God and the poor people of Christ. Let us go...»

276. In the Garden of Mary of Magdala: Love for One's Neighbour.

16th September 1945.

Jesus is no longer where He was during the last vision. He is in a large garden which extends as far as the lake, and in the middle of it there is a house surrounded by the garden, which at the rear of the house is at least three times as large as on the front and sides. There are flowers, but above all trees, thickets and green nooks, some around fountain-basins of precious marbles, some like bowers around tables and stone seats. And there must have been statues here and there, both along the paths and in the centre of the basins. Only the pedestals of the statues are now left as a remembrance, near laurel and box shrubs or reflected in the basins full of limpid water.

The presence of Jesus with His disciples and of people from Magdala, among whom there is little Benjamin who dared to tell the Iscariot that he was a bad man, makes me think that they are the gardens of the Magdalene's house...

which have been conveniently altered for a new function by removing what might have disgusted or scandalised or reminded one of the past.

The lake is a grey-blue crêpe reflecting the sky, where clouds are sailing swiftly, laden with the first autumn rain. But it is beautiful even so, in the still placid light of a day which is not clear but not entirely rainy. Its shores are no longer covered with flowers, they are however painted by the great painter which is autumn and they show ochre and purple hues and the exhausted pallor of the withering leaves of trees and vineyards, which change colour before yielding to the earth their living clothing. In the garden of a villa overlooking the lake like this one, there is a spot which has turned red, as if it poured blood into the water, due to the presence of a hedge of flexible branches, which autumn has coloured with a blazing copper hue, while the willow-trees spread along the shore, not far from the garden, seem to be trembling, as their slender silver-green leaves quiver and look paler than usual before dying.

Jesus is not looking at what I am watching. He is looking at some poor sick people whom He cures. He is looking at some old beggars to whom He gives some money. He is looking at some children offered to Him by their mothers that He may bless them. And He is looking pitifully at a group of sisters, who are informing Him of the behaviour of their only brother, who has caused their mother to die of a broken heart and has brought about their ruin, and the poor women beg Him to give them some advice and to pray for them.

«I will certainly pray for you. I will ask God to give you peace and I will pray for him, that he may turn and remember that you are his sisters, giving you what is fair and above all that he may love you once again. Because if he does that, he will do everything else. But do you love him, or have you a grudge against him? Do you forgive him wholeheartedly or is there anger in your tears? Because he is unhappy, too. More than you are. And notwithstanding his riches, he is poorer than you are, and you must pity him. He no longer loves and is without the love of God. See how unhappy he is? The sad life he made you lead will end in happiness for you and first of all for your mother. But not for him. On the contrary, from the false present enjoyment he would pass to an eternal dreadful torture. Come with Me. By speaking to you I will speak to everybody.»

And Jesus goes towards the centre of a meadow, where once there must have been a statue and the site is now strewn with groups of flowers. Only the pedestal is now left and it is surrounded by a low hedge of myrtle and miniature roses. Jesus goes towards that hedge and begins to speak. The people become

silent and crowd round Him.

«Peace be with you. Listen. It is written: “Love your neighbour as you love yourself.” But who is our neighbour? The whole of mankind, in a general meaning. In a narrower sense all our countrymen; in an even narrower sense, all our fellow citizens; then in a more and more narrow meaning, all our relatives; finally, the last circle of this crown of love closed like the petals of a rose round the heart of the flower, the love for our full-brothers: our first neighbour. God is the centre of the heart of the flower of love, so love for Him is the first to be had. Around His centre there is the love for our parents, the second to be had, because father and mother are really the little “God” on the earth, as they procreated us and cooperated with God to our creation, besides taking care of us with untiring love. The various love rings press round that ovary which shines with pistils and exhales the perfume of the most choice love. The first is the love for our brothers born of the same womb and same blood as ourselves. How is our brother to be loved? Only because his flesh and blood are the same as ours? Even the little birds which are together in one nest can do that. In fact, this is all they have in common: they were born in the same brood and have on their tongues the flavour of their father's and mother's saliva. We men are worth more than birds. We have more than flesh and blood. We have the Father besides having a father and mother. We have a soul and we have God, the Father of all men. So we must love our brother as a brother, because of our father and mother who gave birth to us, and as a brother because of God Who is the universal Father.

We must love him, therefore, spiritually not only corporeally. We must love him not only because of his body and blood, but because of the spirit which we have in common. And we must love, as it is to be loved, the spirit of our brother more than his body. Because the spirit is more important than the body. Because the Father God is more important than the man father. Because the spirit is worth more than the flesh. Because our brother would be much more unhappy if he lost the Father God than he would be if he lost his man father. It is heart-rending to be deprived of the man father, but it is only half an orphanhood. It is detrimental only to what is earthly, that is to our need for help and caresses. But the spirit, if it can believe, is not damaged by the death of the father. On the contrary, in order to join the just father where he is, the spirit of the son rises as if it were attracted by a loving force. And I tell you solemnly that that is love, love for God and for the father, who has ascended with his soul to the place of wisdom. He ascends to the place where he is closer to God and acts with greater

rectitude, because he does not lack true help, that is the prayers of the father whom he now loves perfectly, neither does he lack restraint due both to the certainty that the father does now see the deeds of his son, better than he did in his lifetime, and to the desire to be able to join him through a holy life.

That is why one must take greater care of the spirit than of the body of the brother. It would certainly be a very poor love if it took care of what is perishable, neglecting what is not perishable and which, if neglected, may lose eternal joy. Too many people tire themselves with useless things and worry themselves about what is of comparative merit, losing sight of what is really necessary. Good sisters and brothers must not worry only about keeping clothes tidy and having meals ready, or helping their brothers with their work. But they must bend over their spirits and listen to their voices, perceive their faults, and with loving patience busy themselves to give them a wholesome holy spirit, if in those voices and faults they see a danger for their eternal lives. And if their brother has sinned against them, they must forgive him and get God to forgive him, through his return to love, without which God will not forgive.

It is written in Leviticus: “You must not bear hatred for your brother in your heart, you must openly tell him of his offence, this way you will not take a sin upon yourself because of him.” But there is an abyss between not hating and loving. You may think that aversion, detachment, indifference are not sins, because they are not hatred. No. I have come to bring new light to love, and consequently, to hatred, because what makes the former shine in every detail, makes every detail of the latter shine as well. The very elevation to high spheres of the former, brings out, as a consequence, a greater detachment from the latter, because the higher love ascends, the lower hatred seems to sink.

My doctrine is perfection. It is refinement of feelings and judgement. It is truth without metaphors and paraphrases. And I tell you that aversion, detachment and indifference are already hatred. Simply because they are not love. Hatred is the opposite of love. Can you find another name for aversion? For being detached from a being? For indifference? He who loves has a liking for the person loved. So if he dislikes him, he no longer loves him. He who loves, even if he is separated materially from the person he loves, continues to be near him with his spirit. So if one is detached with one's spirit from the other, one no longer loves the other. He who loves is never indifferent towards the person he loves, on the contrary he is interested in everything concerning that person. So if one is indifferent towards another, it means that one does not love the other.

You can thus see that those three attitudes are branches of one plant: hatred. Now what happens when we are offended by one whom we love? In ninety per cent of cases, if hatred does not arise, aversion, detachment or indifference will result. No. Do not do that. Do not freeze your hearts by means of those three forms of hatred. Love.

But you are asking yourselves: "How can we?" I reply to you: "As God can, as He loves those who offend Him. A sorrowful but still good love." You say: "How do we do that?" I am giving a new law on the relationship with a guilty brother, and I say: "If your brother offends you, do not humiliate him by reproaching him in public, but urge your love to cover up your brother's fault in the eyes of the world." Because great will be your merit in the eyes of God, by barring, out of love, every satisfaction to your pride.

Oh! How man loves to let people know that he was offended and grieved thereby! Like a foolish beggar he does not go to a king asking for alms in gold, but he goes to other foolish beggars like himself asking for handfuls of ash and manure and mouthfuls of burning poison. That is what the world gives to the offended person who goes complaining and begging for comfort. God, the King, gives pure gold to him, who, being offended, goes without any grudge to weep only at His feet and ask Him, Love and Wisdom, for comfort of love and how to behave in the sorrowful circumstance. Therefore, if you want comfort, go to God and act with love.

I say to you, correcting the old law: "If your brother has sinned against you, go and correct him by yourself. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother once again. And at the same time you have gained many blessings from God. If your brother does not listen to you, but he rejects you persisting in his fault, take with you two or three grave, clever, reliable witnesses, so that no one may say that you are agreeable to his fault or indifferent to the welfare of his soul, and go back to your brother with them, and kindly repeat your remarks in their presence, so that the witnesses may be able to repeat that you have done everything in your power to correct your brother in a holy way. Because that is the duty of a good brother, since the sin committed by him against you is detrimental to his soul, and you must take care of his soul. If that is of no avail, inform the synagogue, so that he may be called to order in the name of God. If even so he does not make amends and he rejects the synagogue or the Temple as he rejected you, consider him as a publican and a Gentile."

Do that both with your full brothers and with the people you love. Because also

with your remote neighbour you must behave with holiness, generosity, flexibility and love. And when it is a law-suit and it is necessary to go to court and you go with your adversary, I tell you, o man, who often find yourself in greater evils through your own fault, to do everything in your power, while you are on the way, to make your peace with him, whether you are right or wrong. Because human justice is always imperfect and a shrewd man generally defeats justice and the offender might be considered innocent, whilst you, who are innocent, might be found guilty. And then not only your right would not be acknowledged, but you would lose the case and from being innocent you would be found guilty of slander and so the judge would hand you over to the law-executor who would not let you free until you had paid down to the last penny.

Be conciliating. Does your pride suffer by it? Very well. Is money squeezed out of you? Better still. Providing your holiness increases. Do not feel nostalgia for gold. Do not crave for praises. Let God praise you. Ensure that you have your purse in Heaven. And pray for those who offend you. That they may make amends. If that happens, they themselves will give you back honour and goods. If they do not, God will.

Go, now, because it is time for your meal. Let only the beggars stay and sit at the apostolic table. Peace be with you.»

277. Jesus Sends the Seventy-Two Disciples.

17th of September 1945.

After the meal Jesus dismisses the poor guests and remains with His apostles and disciples in the garden of Mary of Magdala. They sit at the very end of it, near the calm water of the lake, on which some sailing boats are fishing.

«They will have a good catch» comments Peter who is watching them.

«You will have a good catch, too, Simon of Jonah.»

«Me, my Lord? When? Do You want me to go out and fish for our food for tomorrow? I will go at once and...»

«We do not need any food in this house. You will have a good catch in future, in

the spiritual field. And most of these will be very good fishermen like you.»

«Not everyone, Master?» asks Matthew.

«Not everyone. But those who will persevere and become My priests will have good catches.»

«Conversions?» asks James of Zebedee.

«They will convert, forgive, lead back to God. Oh! so many things.»

«Listen, Master. You said before that if a man does not even listen to his brother in the presence of witnesses, the synagogue is to admonish him. Now, if I have understood correctly what You have been telling us since we met, I think that the synagogue will be replaced by the Church, the thing that You want to found. If so, where will we go to have our pig-headed brothers admonished?»

«You will do that yourselves, because you will be My Church. So believers will come to you, for advice for themselves or for advice for other people. I will tell you more. You will not be able only to give advice. You will be able to absolve in My Name. You will be able to release people from the chains of sin and you will be able to join two people who love each other so that they become one body. And what you do will be valid in the eyes of God, as if God Himself had done it. I tell you solemnly that whatever you bind on the earth will be bound in Heaven and whatever you absolve on the earth will be absolved in Heaven. And I say to you also, to make you understand the power of My Name, of brotherly love and prayer, that *if two disciples of Mine, and I mean as such all those who will believe in the Christ, will gather together to ask for any just thing in My Name, that thing will be granted to them by My Father.* Because prayer is a great power, brother union is a great power, My Name is a very great infinite power and so is My presence among you. And where two or three people are gathered in My Name, I shall be in the midst of them, and I will pray with them and the Father will not refuse anything to those who pray with Me. *Many do not get what they ask for, because they pray by themselves, or they ask for what is illicit, or they pray with pride or sin in their hearts. Make your hearts pure, so that I can be with you, then pray and you will be heard.*»

Peter is thoughtful. Jesus notices it and asks him why. And Peter replies: «I am thinking of the great duty to which we are destined. And I am afraid of it. I am afraid I cannot accomplish it properly.»

«In fact Simon of Jonah or James of Alphaeus or Philip, and so on, would not do

it properly. But Peter the priest, James the priest, Philip the priest or Thomas will do very well because they will be acting together with Divine Wisdom.»

«And... how many times will we have to forgive our brethren? How many times if they sin against the priests; and how many if they sin against God? Because, if things will happen then, as they do now, they will certainly sin against us, since they sin against You so many times. Tell me whether I have to forgive always or a number of times. For instance, seven times, or more?»

«I will not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven. An endless number. Because also the Father of Heaven will forgive you many times, a great number of times, and you ought to be perfect. So do as He does with you, because you will represent God on the earth. Nay, listen. I will tell you a parable which will help everybody.»

And Jesus, Who was surrounded by the apostles only, in a box thicket, goes towards the disciples who are respectfully gathered in an open space adorned with a fountain-basin full of clear water. Jesus' smile is like a sign that He is going to speak. And while He walks with long slow steps, so that in a few moments He covers a good distance without rushing, they are all delighted and press round Him as children gather round those who make them happy. It is a circle of keen faces, until Jesus leans against a tall tree and begins to speak.

«What I said before to the people is to be completed for you who have been chosen from the people. The apostle Simon of Jonah asked Me: “How many times must I forgive? Whom? Why?” I replied to him privately and I will now repeat My reply as it is fair that you should know now as well.

Listen how many times, how and why you have to forgive. You must forgive as God forgives, Who forgives a thousand times, if one sins a thousand times and repents. Providing He sees that in man there is no will to sin, no pursuit of what makes one sin and that sin is only the result of man's weakness. In the case of voluntary persistence in sin there can be no forgiveness for sins against the Law. But with regard to the grief such sins cause you individually, you are to forgive them. Always forgive those who harm you. Forgive, so that you may be forgiven, because you have sinned also against God and your brothers.

Forgiveness opens the Kingdom of Heaven both to him who is forgiven and to him who forgives. It is like what happened to a king and his servants.

A king wanted to draw up the accounts with his servants. He called them one by one, beginning with those who were in the highest positions. There was one who

owed the king ten thousand talents. But the servant could not pay back the advance the king had given him to build his house and purchase all kinds of goods, because in actual fact, for many more or less justified reasons, he had not made a very diligent use of the money lent to him for that purpose. The king and master was angry at his sloth and breakage of his word, and ordered him, his wife, children and all his possessions to be sold until he settled his debt. But the servant threw himself at the king's feet and weeping implored him: "Let me go. Have a little more patience and I will give you back everything I owe you to the last penny." The king was moved by so much distress – he was a good king – and not only agreed to his request, but when he heard that diseases had been the cause of his lack of diligence and failure to pay, he also remitted his debt.

The servant went away happily. But on his way out he ran into another servant, a poor fellow to whom he had lent one hundred denarii taken from the ten thousand talents received from the king. As he felt sure of the king's protection he thought everything was permissible to him and he seized the unhappy fellow by the throat saying: "Give me what you owe me." In vain the man stooped weeping to kiss his feet imploring: "Have mercy on me as I have had much bad luck. Have a little patience and I will pay everything back to you to the last penny." The cruel servant sent for militiamen and had the poor wreck taken to prison so that he would make up his mind and pay him, or lose his freedom or his very life.

The friends of the unhappy man came to know about it, and being very upset, they went and told the king and master, who, upon hearing the news, ordered the pitiless servant to be brought before him and looking at him severely said: "You wicked servant, I helped you the first time, that you might become merciful, that you might become a rich man, then I helped you by remitting your debt when you implored me to have patience. You did not have pity on your fellow servant, whilst I, a king, had so much pity on you. Why did you not treat your fellow servant as I treated you?"

And in his anger he handed him over to the jailors to be kept by them until he paid everything back, saying: "As he did not have pity on one who owed him very little, while he had so much pity from me who am a king, so I will no longer have pity on him."

And that is how My Father will deal with you if you are pitiless towards your brothers, if you are more guilty than a believer, after receiving so much from God. Remember that it is your duty to be more faultless than anybody else.

Remember that God gives you a great treasure in advance, but He wants you to render an account of it. Remember that no one must be able to grant love and forgiveness like you.

Do not be servants exacting much for yourselves and giving nothing to those who ask you for help. As you do to others, it will be done to you. And you will be asked to give an account of how other people behave, if they have been led to good or to evil by your examples. Oh! If you have sanctified people, your glory in Heaven will be really great! But, likewise, if you have been corrupters or only sluggish in sanctifying, you will be severely punished.

I say to you once again: if any of you does not feel like being the victim of his own mission, let him go away. But let him not fall in it. I mean: let him not fail in what is pernicious to his own and other people's perfection. And let him have God as his friend, always forgiving your weak brothers from your hearts. Then each of you, who will thus forgive, will be forgiven by God the Father.

Our stay has come to an end. The time of Tabernacles is close at hand. Those to whom I spoke separately this morning, as from tomorrow will go ahead of Me announcing Me to the people. Those who are staying must not lose heart. I have kept some of them for prudential reasons, not because I disdain them. They will be staying with Me and I will soon send them as I am now sending the first seventy-two disciples.

The harvest is rich, but the labourers are too few compared to what is needed. So there will be work for everyone. But that is not sufficient. So, without being jealous, ask the Lord of the harvest to send new labourers to His harvest. In the meantime, you may go. During the past days, the apostles and I have completed your instructions on the work you have to do, and I have repeated to you what I told the Twelve before sending them.

One of you asked Me: "How will I cure in Your Name?" Always cure the spirit first. Promise the sick people the Kingdom of God if they can believe in Me, and once you have ascertained their faith, order the disease to depart and it will go away. And do likewise with those whose souls are ill. Stimulate their faith first of all. By means of sound words inspire them with Hope. I will then come to grant them Divine Charity, as I put it into your hearts after you believed in Me and hoped for Mercy. And be not afraid of men or of demons. They will not hurt you. The only things you are to fear are: sensuality, pride, avarice. Through them you would hand yourselves over to Satan and devilish men, who also exist.

Go therefore, preceding Me along the roads of the Jordan. And when you arrive in Jerusalem go and join the shepherds in the valley of Bethlehem, and come with them to Me, in the place you know, and we will celebrate together the holy feast, and we will then go back to our ministry more invigorated than ever.

Go in peace. I bless you in the holy Name of the Lord.»

278. Jesus Meets Lazarus at the Field of the Galileans.

18th September 1945.

The famous Field of the Galileans – I think that is the meaning of the word used by Jesus to point out the meeting place with the seventy-two disciples sent ahead of Him – is part of the Mount of Olives, towards the road to Bethany, which actually passes there. And it is precisely in this place that in a vision of long ago, I saw Joachim and Anne camp with Alphaeus, then a little boy, near other tents made with branches, at the Feast of the Tabernacles, which preceded the conception of the Blessed Virgin.

The summit of the Mount of Olives is smooth: everything is smooth and pleasant on that mountain: the slopes, the view, the summit. It really inspires peace, clad as it is with olive-trees and silence. But not now. Because it is swarming with people intent on making their tents. But generally it is a place of tranquillity and meditation. On the left hand side, with respect to those facing north, there is a light depression, and then another summit which is even smoother than the previous one.

And it is on this tableland that the Galileans camp. I do not know whether it is an age-old religious custom or whether they do so by order of the Romans to avoid conflicts with Judaeans and peoples of other regions, who are never very kind to Galileans. I do not know. I know that I can see many Galileans, amongst them Alphaeus of Sarah from Nazareth; Judas, the old land owner from Merom; Jairus, the head of the synagogue and other people from Bethsaida, Capernaum and other towns in Galilee, but whose names I do not know.

Jesus points out the place where they should put up their tents, on the eastern edge of the Field of the Galileans. And the apostles, together with some

disciples, among whom there is John the priest and John the scribe, Timoneus, the head of the synagogue, Stephen, Ermasteus, Joseph of Emmaus, Abel of Bethlehem in Galilee, begin to make their tents with branches.

While they do so, Jesus speaks to some children from Capernaum, who have pressed round Him asking Him dozens of questions and confiding to Him as many pieces of information, when Lazarus arrives from the Bethany road with Maximinus, his inseparable companion. Jesus is facing the opposite direction and cannot see him.

But the Iscariot does and he informs the Master, Who leaves the children and goes towards His friend smiling. Maximinus stops a few steps behind, to leave the two completely free in their first approach. And Lazarus covers the last few yards, as fast as he can, walking more painfully than ever, with a smile which trembles with pain on his lips and shines with tears in his eyes. Jesus opens His arms and Lazarus falls on to His heart, bursting into tears.

«What, My dear friend? Are you still weeping?...» asks Jesus, kissing his temple. He is so much taller than Lazarus, from His shoulders upwards, and looks even taller, as Lazarus is bent in his embrace of love and respect.

At last Lazarus looks up and says: «Yes, I am weeping. Last year I gave You the pearls of my sad tears, it is therefore fair that I give You the pearls of my tears of joy. Oh! Master, my Master! I think that there is nothing more humble and holy than good tears... And I give them to You, to say: “Thank You” for my Mary who is now a kind, happy, serene, pure good girl... Oh, much better than when she was a little girl. And I, I who felt that I was much above her, in my pride of an Israelite faithful to the Law, now I feel I am so tiny, so... nothing, as compared to her, who is no longer a woman, but a flame. A sanctifying flame. I... I cannot understand where she finds the wisdom, the words, the actions, which edify the whole household. I look at her as one looks at a mystery. But how could so much fire, such a jewel be hidden under so much rotteness and be there comfortably? Neither I nor Martha can ascend where she ascends. But how can she, if her wings were broken by vice? I do not understand...»

«And there is no need for you to understand. It is enough that I understand. But I tell you that Mary has turned the powerful energy of her being towards Good. She has bent her character towards Perfection. And since her character is of powerful absolutism, she thrusts herself unreservedly on that way. She makes use of her experience in evil to be as powerful in good as she was in evil and

using the same method of giving herself entirely, as she did in evil, she has given herself entirely to God. She has understood the law of “love God with your whole being, with your body, your soul and with all your strength.” If Israel were made of Maries, if the world were made of Maries, we would have the Kingdom on God on the earth, as it will be in the most high Heaven.»

«Oh! Master! And it is Mary of Magdala who deserves such words!...»

«It is Mary of Lazarus. The great friend, the sister of My great friend. How did you know that I was here, if My Mother has not yet come to Bethany?»

«The steward of the Clear Water has come to me, by forced marches, and told me that You were coming. Every day I sent a servant here. A little while ago he came saying: “He has arrived and is at the Field of the Galileans.” I left immediately...»

«But you are suffering...»

«So much, Master! My legs...»

«And you came. I would have come, soon...»

«My anxiety to tell You my joy was tormenting me. I have had it in my heart for months. A letter! How can a letter say such things? I could not wait any longer... Will You come to Bethany?»

«Of course. Immediately after the Feast.»

«You are anxiously awaited... That Greek girl... What a mind! I speak very much with her, anxious as she is to learn about God. But she is very well educated... and I succumb, because I do not know certain things very well. It takes You.»

«And I will come. Now let us go to Maximinus, and then I beg You to be My guest. My Mother will be happy to see you and you will be able to rest. She will soon be here with the boy.»

And they go to Maximinus who kneels down greeting Him...

279. The Seventy-Two Disciples Report to Jesus What They Have Done.

19th September 1945.

The seventy-two disciples come back at the long twilight of a clear October day with Elias, Joseph and Levi. They are tired and covered with dust, but so happy! The three shepherds are happy that they are now free to serve the Master. They are happy also because, after so many years of separation, they are with their companions of long ago. The seventy-two are happy because they have accomplished their first mission satisfactorily. Their faces shine more than the little lamps which light up the little tents built for the large group of pilgrims.

Jesus' tent is in the centre and under it there is the Blessed Virgin with Marjiam who helps Her to prepare supper. Around it there are the tents of the apostles. Mary of Alphaeus is in the tent of James and Judas; Mary Salome and her husband are in John and James'; in the one near it there is Susanna with her husband, who is not an apostle or disciple... officially,... but he must have made a claim to stay there, since he granted his wife permission to be entirely of Jesus. Then, around them, there are the tents of the disciples, some of whom are with their families, some without. And those who are alone, as most of them are, have joined one or more companions. John of Endor has taken in the solitary Ermasteus, but he has endeavoured to be as close as possible to Jesus' tent, so that Marjiam often goes to him, taking one thing or another and cheering him up with the words of an intelligent child who is happy to be with Jesus, Mary and Peter, and at a feast as well.

After supper Jesus goes towards the slopes of the olive grove and the disciples follow Him all together.

When they are far from the babel and the crowd, after praying together, they report to Jesus in greater detail than they were able to do before, among those going and coming. And they are amazed and happy when they say: «Do You know, Master, that not only diseases but also demons obeyed us because of the power of Your Name? What a wonderful thing, Master! We poor men were able to release a man from the dreadful power of a demon, only because You had sent us!...» and they tell of many cases which happened here or there. Only of one possessed they say: «His relatives, or rather his mother and neighbours brought him to us by force. But the demon scoffed at us saying: “I have come back here by his will after the Nazarene had driven me out and I will not leave him again

because he loves me more than he loves your Master and he looked for me” and with indomitable strength he suddenly tore the man away from those who were holding him and hurled him down a precipice. We ran to see whether he had been dashed to pieces. He had not! He was running like a young gazelle repeating curses and quips not really of this world... We felt sorry for his mother... But he!... Oh! can the demon do all that?»

«All that and much more» says Jesus sadly.

«Perhaps if You had been there...»

«No. I admonished him: “Go and do not relapse into your sin.” But he did. He knew he wanted evil and he agreed. He is lost. There is a difference between a man who is possessed the first time through his ignorance and a man who wants to be possessed knowing that by doing so he sells himself again to the demon. But do not speak of him. He is a member cut off without hope. He is a volunteer of Evil. Let us rather praise the Lord for the victories He granted you. I know the name of the culprit and the names of those who have been saved. I could see Satan fall from heaven like a thunderbolt through your merits joined to My Name. Because I saw also your sacrifices, your prayers, the love with which you went towards unhappy people to do what I had told you to do. You have acted with love and God blessed you. Others will do what you do, but they will do it without love. And they will not get conversions... But do not rejoice because you have subdued spirits, but rejoice because your names are written in Heaven. Never remove them from there...»

«Master, when will those come who will not get conversions? Perhaps when You are no longer with us?» asks one of the disciples whose name I do not know.

«No, Agapo. Any time.»

«What? Also when You teach and love us?»

«Yes. I will always love you, also when you are far from Me. My love will always come to you and you will perceive it.»

«Oh! that is true. I perceived it one evening when I was vexed because I did not know how to reply to one who was asking me questions. I was on the point of running away shamefully. But I remembered Your words: “Be not afraid. You will be given at the right moment the words to be spoken” and I invoked You in my spirit. I said: “Jesus certainly loves me. I am calling His love to assist me”

and Your love came to me. Like a fire, a light... a strength... The man before me was watching me sneering ironically and winking at his friends. He was sure to win the argument. I opened my mouth and it was like a river of words which flowed out joyfully from my silly mouth. Master, did You really come, or was it an illusion? I do not know. I know that at the end the man – he was a young scribe – threw his arms round my neck saying: “You are blessed and blessed is He who has led you to such wisdom” and he seemed anxious to find You. Will he come?»

«Man's thoughts are as labile as words written on water, and his will is as restless as the wing of a swallow flying about for its last meal of the day. But pray for him... Yes. I did come to you. And Matthias and Timoneus, and John of Endor and Simon and Samuel and Jonah: they all had Me. Some were conscious of My presence, some were not. But I was with you. And I shall be with those who serve Me with love and truth forever and ever.»

«Master, You have not yet told us whether among those who are present there will be someone without love...»

«It is not necessary to know that. It would be lack of love on My part to instigate indignation towards a companion who is not capable of loving.»

«But are there any? You can tell us that...»

«Yes, there are. Love is the simplest, sweetest and rarest thing there is, and even when it is sown, it does not always take root.»

«But if we do not love You, who can?» There is almost anger among the apostles and disciples who are upset by suspicion and sorrow.

Jesus closes His eyes. He conceals them that they may give no hint. But He makes a resigned, kind, sad gesture with His hands, which He stretches out with open palms, His gesture of resigned confession and admission and He says: «That is how it should be. But it is not so. Many do not know themselves yet. But I know them. And I pity them.»

«Oh! Master! Is it I perhaps?» asks Peter going close to Jesus, squeezing poor Marjiam between himself and the Master and throwing his short muscular arms towards the shoulders of Jesus Whom he grasps and shakes, looking mad with the terror of being one who does not love Jesus.

Jesus opens His bright but sad eyes and looking at Peter's inquisitive and

frightened face, He says to him: «No, Simon of Jonah. Not you. You know how to love and you will love more and more. You are My Stone, Simon of Jonah. A good stone. I will lay on it the things dearest to Me and I am sure that you will support them without any disturbance.»

«And I?», «I?», «I?». The question is being repeated like an echo from mouth to mouth.

«Peace! Peace! Be calm and endeavour, all of you, to possess love.»

«But which of us knows how to love most?»

Jesus looks round at everyone: a smiling caress... He then lowers His eyes and looks at Marjiam still squeezed between Himself and Peter and pushing Peter aside a little, He turns the boy round with his face towards the little crowd and says: «Here is he who knows how to love most among you. The boy. But you, whose cheeks are covered with beards and whose hair is grey, must not tremble with fear. Whoever is born again in Me becomes “a child.” Oh! go in peace! Praise God Who called you, because you really see with your eyes the wonders of the Lord. Blessed are those who will also see what you see. Because I assure you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but they did not see it, and many patriarchs would have liked to know what you know, but they did not know, and many just people would have liked to hear what you hear but they were not able to hear it. But from now on those who love Me, will know everything.»

«And after? When You have gone, as You say?»

«Afterwards you will speak on My behalf. And later... Oh! large groups, not by number but by grace, of those who will see, know and hear what you now see, know and hear! Oh! large beloved multitudes of My “little-big” ones! Eternal eyes, eternal minds, eternal ears! How can I explain to you, who are around Me, what this eternal living will be, rather than eternal, endless living of those who will love Me and whom I will love to the extent of abolishing time, and they will be “the citizens of Israel” even if they live when Israel will be simply the remembrance of a nation, and they will be the contemporaries of Jesus living in Israel. And they will be with Me and in Me, until they learn what time has cancelled and pride has confused. What name shall I give them? You apostles, you disciples, the believers will be called “Christians.” And those? What name will they have? A name known only in Heaven. What reward will they receive from the earth? My kiss, My voice, the warmth of My body. All Myself. I, they,

They, I. Utter communion... Go. I will stay to delight My spirit in the contemplation of those who in future will know and love Me in an absolute manner. Peace be with you.»

280. At the Temple for the Tabernacles.

20th September 1945.

Jesus is going to the Temple. The male disciples precede Him in groups, the women disciples follow Him, also in groups, that is, His Mother, Mary of Clopas, Mary Salome, Susanna, Johanna of Chuza, Eliza of Bethzur, Annaleah of Jerusalem, Martha and Marcella. The Magdalene is not there. The twelve apostles and Marjiam are around Jesus.

Jerusalem is in the pomp of its solemn festivities. There are people in every street and from every country. Singing, talking, whispering of prayers, the cursing of ass-drivers, the weeping of children can be heard everywhere. And above all the confusion there is the clear sky visible between houses and a pleasant sunshine which brightens up the colours of garments and enlivens the dying shades of pergolas and trees, glimpses of which can be caught here and there, beyond the walls of closed gardens and terraces.

Jesus at times meets acquaintances and their greetings are more or less respectful according to the mood of the person He meets. Gamaliel in fact bows deeply but superciliously and stares at Stephen, who smiles at him from the group of disciples and whom Gamaliel calls aside, after bowing to Jesus, and says a few words to him. Stephen then goes back to his group. The salutation of Cleopas of Emmaus, the old head of the synagogue, is revering; he is on his way to the Temple with his fellow citizens. As harsh as a curse is the reply of the Pharisees of Capernaum to Jesus' greeting. Johanah's peasants, led by their steward, greet Jesus by throwing themselves on the ground and kissing His feet in the dust of the road.

The crowds are amazed and stop to watch the group of men who at a cross-roads prostrate themselves with a cry at the feet of a young man, who is neither, a Pharisee nor a famous scribe, who is neither a satrap nor a powerful courtier, and some ask who he is and a whisper spreads: «He is the Rabbi of Nazareth,

the one who is said to be the Messiah.» Proselytes and Gentiles then crowd inquisitively, pressing the group against the wall, causing obstruction in the little square, until a group of ass-drivers scatters them shouting imprecations.

But the crowd soon gathers again, separating women from men, in a harsh demanding manner which is also a manifestation of faith. Everybody wishes to touch Jesus' garments, say a word to Him, ask Him questions. Their efforts are quite futile, because in their haste, in their anxiety and restlessness to move forward, they push one another so that no one is successful and even questions, and answers become muddled in the babel.

The only one who disregards the scene is Marjiam's grandfather, who replied with a shout to his grandson's shout, and immediately after revering the Master has clasped the boy to his heart and remaining thus, sitting back on his heels, his knees on the ground, is holding him on his lap, admiring and caressing him with tears and joyful kisses, asking him questions and listening to him. The old man is already in Paradise, so happy as he is.

The Roman troops rush to the spot thinking there is a brawl and they push through the crowd. But when they see Jesus they smile and withdraw tranquilly and merely advise the people present to clear out of the important cross-roads. Jesus obeys at once, taking advantage of the space made by the Romans, who are walking a few steps ahead of Him, as if they were making way for Him, whereas in actual fact they are going back to their outpost; the Roman guard has in fact been reinforced, as if Pilate were aware of the ill-feeling of the crowds and were afraid of an insurrection when Jerusalem is full of Jews from all over. And it is beautiful to see Him go, preceded by the Roman squad, like a king, to whom they make way, while he goes to his possessions.

When passing by, He says to the boy and the old man: «Remain together and follow Me» and to the steward: «Please leave your men with Me. They will be My guests until this evening.»

The steward replies respectfully: «Everything will be done as You wish» and he goes away after bowing deeply.

The Temple is now close at hand and the swarming of the crowds, just like ants near the ant-nest, is even denser, when one of Johanah's peasants shouts: «There is our master!» and falls on his knees to greet him, imitated by all the others.

Jesus remains standing in the middle of a group of people prostrated, because

the peasants had gathered round Him. He turns round looking towards the place pointed out by the peasant, and meets the glance of a Pharisee pompously dressed, whom I have already seen, but I do not know where.

Johanah, the Pharisee, is with other people of his caste: a heap of precious clothes of fringes, buckles, sashes, phylacteries, all larger than common ones. Johanah looks at Jesus attentively: a glance of mere curiosity, but not disrespectful. Nay, his salutation is a stiff one: just a slight inclination of the head. But it is a greeting to which Jesus replies respectfully. Two or three more Pharisees greet Him, whilst others look scornfully or pretend to be looking elsewhere, only one hurls an insult and the people near Jesus start, and even Johanah turns round immediately, fulminating with his eyes the offender, a man younger than he is, with hard conspicuous features.

Once they have gone by and the peasants dare to speak, one of them says: «That is Doras, Master», the one who cursed You.»

«Never mind. I have you who bless Me» replies Jesus calmly.

Leaning against an archivolt there is Manaen with other people, and as soon as he sees Jesus, he raises his arms with a cry of joy: «This is surely a joyous day, as I found You!» and he moves towards Jesus, followed by those who are with him. He reveres Jesus under the shady archivolt, where voices resound like under a dome.

While Manaen is greeting Jesus, His cousins Simon and Joseph pass near the apostolic group with other Nazarenes... but they do not even say hullo... Jesus looks at them sadly but does not say anything. Judas and James speak to each other excitedly, Judas quivers with rage and runs away, resisting restraint by his brother. But Jesus calls him with such a commanding voice: «Judas, come here!» that Alphaeus' vexed son comes back... «Leave them alone. They are like seed which has not yet felt springtime. Leave them in the dark of the insensitive sod. I will penetrate it just the same, even if the sod should become jasper closed round the seed. I will do it in due time.»

But the weeping of Mary of Alphaeus, who is desolate, resounds louder than the answer of Judas of Alphaeus. The long weeping of a distressed person... But Jesus does not turn round to comfort her although her groaning is very clearly heard under the archivolt resounding with echoes.

He continues to speak to Manaen who says to Him: «These are disciples of

John's and have come with me. Like me, they want to be Yours.

«Peace be with good disciples. Over there are Matthias, John and Simeon, who are now with Me for good. I welcome you as I welcomed them, because everything that comes from the holy Precursor is dear to Me.»

They have now reached the enclosure of the Temple. Jesus gives instructions to the Iscariot and Simon Zealot for the ritual purchases and offerings. He then calls John, the priest, and says to him:

«Since you come from this place, make arrangements to invite some Levites whom you know to be worthy of becoming acquainted with the Truth. Because this year I can really celebrate a joyful feast. Never again will the day be so pleasant...»

«Why, my Lord?» asks John, the scribe.

«Because I have you around Me, all of you, either with your visible presence or with your souls.»

«But we shall always be! And many more with us» states the apostle John emphatically. And everybody echoes him.

Jesus smiles, but remains silent, while John, the priest, goes away, to the Temple, together with Stephen, to carry out the order. Jesus shouts after him: «Join us at the Porch of the Pagans.»

They enter and almost immediately they meet Nicodemus, who bows deeply, but does not approach Jesus. But he exchanges with Jesus a meaningful smile full of peace.

While the women stop where they are allowed, Jesus goes with the men to the place of Jews, to pray, and after accomplishing the rite, He comes back to join those who are waiting for Him at the Porch of the Pagans.

The very large and high porches are crowded with people listening to the lessons of the rabbis. Jesus directs His steps to the spot where the two apostles and the two disciples sent ahead are standing waiting for Him. He is soon surrounded by people, as many people, spread in the crowded marble court, join the apostles and disciples. Curiosity is such that some disciples of rabbis also approach the circle round Jesus, but I do not know whether they do so spontaneously or because their masters have sent them.

Jesus asks point blank: «Why are you pressing round Me? Tell Me. You have well known rabbis, who are well liked by everybody. I am the Unknown and Disliked One. So why do you come to Me?»

«Because we love You» reply some, some say: «Because Your words are different from the words of the others», some: «To see Your miracles» or: «Because we have heard people talk about You» or: «Because You alone have words of eternal life and deeds corresponding to Your words», and finally some say: «Because we want to join Your disciples.»

Jesus looks at the people while they speak, as if He wanted to pierce them with His eyes and read their most hidden thoughts and some of them, who cannot resist His glance, go away or hide behind a column or behind people taller than they are.

Jesus resumes: «But do you know what it means and what it is to follow Me? I am replying to those words only, because curiosity does not deserve a reply and because those who hunger for My words obviously love Me and wish to join Me. So, those who have spoken form two groups: curious people whom I disregard, and volunteers, whom I wish to acquaint with the severity of that vocation.

To follow Me as a disciple means renouncing all affections for one only love: Mine. The selfish love for oneself, the guilty love for riches, sensuality or power, the honest love for one's wife, the holy love for one's father and mother, the deep love for and of children and brothers, must all yield to My love, if one wishes to be Mine. I tell you solemnly that My disciples must be more free than birds flying in the sky, more free than winds blowing across the firmament without anyone or anything holding them back. They must be free, with no heavy chains, with no ties of material love, without even the thin cobwebs of the slightest barrier. The spirit is a delicate butterfly enclosed in the heavy cocoon of the flesh and even the iridescent impalpable web of a spider can slow down its flight or stop it all together: the spider of sensuality, of the lack of generosity in sacrifice. I want everything, unreservedly. The spirit needs such freedom and generosity in giving, to be sure that it is not entangled in the cobwebs of affections, habits, considerations, fears, stretched out like as many threads by the monstrous spider which is Satan, the robber of souls.

If one wants to come to Me and does not hate in a holy manner father, mother, wife, children, brothers and sisters, and one's very life, one cannot be My

disciple. I said: "hate in a holy manner." Within your hearts you are saying: "Hatred, as He taught us, is never holy. So He is contradicting Himself." No. I am not contradicting Myself. *I say that you must hate the heaviness of love, the sensual passionateness of love for your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and for your very life, on the contrary I order you to love relatives and life with the light freedom of spirits.* Love them in God and for God, never postponing God to them, endeavouring and taking care to lead them where the disciple has already arrived, that is to God, the Truth. You will thus love God and relatives in a holy manner, safeguarding each love, so that family ties will not be a burden but wings, not a fault, but justice. You must be prepared to hate even your lives in order to follow Me. *He hates his life who without fear of losing it or making it sad from a human point of view, uses it to serve Me.* But it is only an appearance of hatred. A feeling erroneously called "hatred" by man who cannot elevate himself, as he is entirely earthly, by little superior to brutes.

In actual fact such apparent hatred, *which consists in denying sensual satisfaction to one's life in order to give a more and more intense life to the spirit, is love. It is love, of the highest degree and the most blessed.* To deny oneself base satisfactions, to reject sensual affections, to risk unfair reproaches, criticism and punishment, being rejected, cursed and perhaps persecuted, all that is a sequence of grief. But it is necessary to embrace such grief and take it upon yourselves, like a cross, a scaffold on which all past faults are expiated to be justified by God, from Whom you can obtain every true, mighty, holy grace for those whom we love. *He who does not carry his cross and does not follow Me, he who cannot do that cannot be My disciple.*

Therefore, you who say: "We have come because we want to join Your disciples" must ponder on that very carefully. It is not a shame, but it is wisdom to weigh and judge oneself and admit both to oneself and others: "I am not the stuff of which disciples are made." What? The heathens have as a basis of one of their doctrines the necessity of "*knowing oneself*", and could you Israelites not do that to gain Heaven?

Because, remember this, blessed are those who will come to Me. *But rather than come to betray Me and Him Who sent Me, it is better not to come at all, and remain children of the Law, as you have been so far.* Woe betide those who, after saying: "I will come", cause damage to the Christ by being the betrayers of the Christian idea, the scandalisers of little ones and of good people! Woe betide them! And yet there will always be some of them!

You ought therefore to imitate him who wants to build a tower. First he carefully works out the necessary expenses and counts his money to ensure that he has enough to complete the work, lest, after laying the foundation, he may have to stop building through lack of money. In which case he would lose what he had previously and would be left without tower and without talents and over and above he would be scoffed at by people saying: "He began to build but was not able to finish the job. He can now stuff his stomach with the ruins of his unfinished building."

Imitate the kings of the earth also, by letting the poor events of the world be useful for supernatural teaching. When they want to go to war with another king, they calmly and carefully examine everything, the pros and cons, they consider whether the benefit of the conquest is worth the lives of the subjects, they study whether it is possible to conquer the place, whether their forces, which are half those of their enemy, but more pugnacious, can win; and as they rightly think that it is unlikely that ten thousand can beat twenty thousand soldiers, before clashing with the enemy, they send ambassadors with rich gifts for the other king, and thus soothe him, as his suspicions had already been aroused by the military movements of the other, they disarm him with some proof of friendship, they dispel his doubts and fears and make a treaty of peace with him, which is always more advantageous than a war, both from the human and spiritual point of view.

That is what you must do before beginning a new life and fighting the world. *Because to be My disciples implies going against the stormy and violent trend of the world, of flesh and of Satan.* And if you feel that you do not have the courage to renounce everything for My sake, do not come to Me, because you cannot be My disciples.»

«All right. What You say is true» agrees a scribe who has mingled with the crowd. «But if we divest ourselves of everything, with what shall we serve You? The Law contains commandments which are like money which God has given man so that by making use of it he may buy eternal life. You say: "Renounce everything" and You mention father, mother, riches, honours. God has given us those things also, and through Moses He has told us to use them in a holy way in order to appear just in the eyes of God. If You take everything away from us, what will You give us?»

«True love, as I said, rabbi. I give you My doctrine which does not take one iota away from the old Law, but perfects it.»

«So we are all disciples alike, because we all have the same things.»

«We all have them according to the Mosaic Law. But not everybody has them according to the Law perfected by Me according to Love. Not everyone achieves in it the same amount of merits. Even among My disciples not everybody will have the same amount of merits and some not only will not have an amount, but will lose also the only coin they have: their souls.»

«What? Who was given more will be left with more. Your disciples, or rather Your apostles, are following You in Your mission and are aware of Your ways of behaving, and have had very much, Your real disciples have received much, those who are disciples only by name have received less, and those who like me listen to You only by accident receive nothing. It is obvious that Your apostles will have very much in Heaven, Your real disciples much, Your disciples by name less, those like me nothing.»

«It is obvious from a human point of view, but even from a human point of view it is wrong. Because not everybody is capable of making the goods received yield a profit. Listen to this parable and forgive Me if My lesson is too long. But I am a swallow of passage, and I stop in the House of the Father only for a little while, as I came for the whole world, and also because this little world, which is the Temple of Jerusalem, will not allow Me to interrupt My flight and remain where the glory of the Lord calls Me.»

«Why do You say that?»

«Because it is the truth.»

The scribe looks round and lowers his head. He can see that it is the truth as it is written on the faces of many members of the Sanhedrin, of rabbis and Pharisees who have been enlarging the crowd around Jesus. Faces green with bile, or purple with wrath, looks equivalent to words of curse and spittle of poison, ill-feeling fomenting everywhere, desire to ill-treat the Christ, which remains a mere desire only because of fear of the many people surrounding the Master with affection and who are ready for anything in order to defend Him, and perhaps because of fear of punishment by Rome, benign towards the meek Galilean Master.

Jesus calmly resumes clarifying His thought by means of a parable: «A man, who was about to set out on a long journey, and thus be away for a long time, called all his servants and committed all his wealth to them. He gave some of

them five silver talents, some two silver talents, some only one gold talent: each according to his position and capability. And then he left. Now the servant who had received five silver talents, negotiated them diligently and after some time they brought him five more. The servant who had received two silver talents, did the same and doubled the amount received. But the servant to whom the master had given most, one talent of pure gold, was seized with fear that he might not be successful, with the fear of thieves and of many fanciful conceptions and above all with laziness, and he dug a deep hole in the ground and hid his master's money in it.

Many months went by and the master came back. He immediately called his servants to give back the money committed to them. The one who had received five silver talents came and said: «Here, my Lord. You gave me five. As I thought it was wrong not to make what you had given me yield some profit, I did my best and I gained five more talents. I was not able to do more...» «Well, very well, my good faithful servant. You have been faithful, willing and honest in little. I will give you authority over much. Come and join in your master's happiness.» Next came the man of two talents and said: «I have taken the liberty of making use of your money to your own profit. Here is the account of how I used your money. See? There were two talents, now there are four. Are you glad, my lord?» And the master gave the good servant the same reply given to the first one.

Last came the one who enjoyed the greatest confidence of the master and had received a gold talent from him. He took it out of the casket and said: «You gave me the greatest value because you know that I am wise and loyal, as I know that you are uncompromising and exacting and will not tolerate loss of your money, but if misfortune befalls you, you make it up with those who are close to you. In actual fact you reap where you have not sown and you harvest where you have not scattered seed and you do not remit a penny to your banker or to your steward for any reason whatever. Your money must be as much as you say. Now, as I was afraid of reducing the value of this treasure, I took it and hid it. I trusted nobody, not even myself. I have now dug it up and I give it back to you. Here is your talent.»

«O unjust lazy servant! Really, you have not loved me, because you have not known me and you have not loved my welfare, because you left it inactive. You have betrayed the confidence I had in you and you belie, accuse and condemn yourself by yourself. You knew that I reap where I have not sown and I harvest

where I have scattered no seed. Why, then, did you not ensure that I could reap and harvest? Is that how you come up to my confidence? Is that how you know me? Why did you not take the money to a banker, so that I might draw it on my return with its interest? I diligently instructed you how to do that and you, silly lazy servant, took no heed of what I told you. Your talent and everything else will be taken off you and given to the man of the ten talents.”

“But he already has ten, while this man is deprived of it...” they objected.

“And that is right. He who has and works with what he has, will be given more and even in excess. But he who has nothing, because he did not want anything, will be deprived also of what was given to him. With regard to the useless servant who betrayed my confidence and left inactive the gifts I had given him, throw him out of my property and let him go and weep and eat his heart out.”

That is the parable. As you see, rabbi, he who had most was left with less, because he did not deserve to keep the gift of God. And it is not necessarily true that one of those whom you call a disciple only by name, having thus little to negotiate, or even one of those who listen to me only by accident, as you say, and have only their souls as money, cannot be successful in getting the gold talent and the interest of it, which will be taken from one who had been given most. The surprises of the Lord are endless because the reactions of man are endless. You will see Gentiles reaching eternal life and Samaritans possessing Heaven, and you will see pure Israelites and followers of Mine losing Heaven and eternal Life.»

Jesus becomes silent as if He wished to put an end to the debate and He turns towards the enclosure of the Temple.

But a doctor of the Law, who had sat down listening gravely under the porch, gets up and standing in His way, asks Him: «Master, what must I do to gain eternal life? You have replied to others, please reply to me as well.»

«Why do you want to tempt Me? Why do you want to lie? Are you hoping that I may say something different from the Law because I add brighter and more perfect ideas to it? What is written in the Law? Tell Me! What is the first commandment of the Law?»

«“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, with all your intelligence. You shall love your neighbour as yourself“.»

«Your reply is correct. Do that and you will have eternal life.»

«And who is my neighbour? The world is full of good and of wicked people, known and unknown, friendly and hostile to Israel. Which is my neighbour?»

«A man going from Jerusalem down to Jericho through the mountain gorges, ran into highwaymen, who after wounding him severely, despoiled him of all his belongings and his very clothes and left him more dead than alive on the edge of the road.

A priest, who had finished his turn at the Temple, travelled down the same road. Oh! He was still smelling of the incense of the Holy! And his soul should have been scented with supernatural kindness and love, after being in the House of God, almost in touch with the Most High. The priest was in a hurry to get back home. So he looked at the wounded man but did not stop. He passed by hurriedly leaving the poor man on the edge of the road.

A Levite passed by. Should he become contaminated who must serve in the Temple? Never! He gathered his tunic so that it might not get stained with blood, he cast a glance over the man moaning in his blood and quickened his pace towards Jerusalem, towards the Temple.

Third came a Samaritan, who was travelling from Samaria towards the ford. He noticed the blood, he stopped, saw the wounded man in the deepening twilight, he dismounted and approached the wounded man, whom he gave a sip of strong and generous wine, he then tore his mantle to make bandages, and gently dressed the man's wounds after bathing them with vinegar and applying oil to them. He mounted the man on his horse and carefully led the animal, supporting the man at the same time, comforting him with kind words, without worrying about all the trouble or being annoyed because the man was of Jewish nationality. When he arrived in town, he took him to an inn, watched over him during the night and at dawn, seeing that he was better, he entrusted him to the innkeeper, paying him in advance with some denarii and saying: “Look after him as you would look after me. On my way back I will make good any extra expense you have, with a good measure, if you do everything well.” And he went away.

Tell Me now, doctor of the Law. Which of these three was a “neighbour” for the man who had run into highwaymen? The priest perhaps? Or the Levite perhaps? Or was it not the Samaritan who did not ask who the wounded man was, why he was wounded, whether he was doing the wrong thing by assisting him, wasting

time and money and running the risk of being taken for his wounder?»

The doctor of the Law replies: «The last one, who took pity on him, was his “neighbour.”»

«Do the same yourself and you will love your neighbour and God in your neighbour and you will deserve eternal life.»

Nobody dare speak and Jesus takes advantage of the situation to join the women waiting for Him near the enclosure and return to town with them. A couple of priests have now joined the disciples, or rather: a priest and a Levite, a venerable old man the former, a very young one the latter.

Jesus is now speaking to His Mother, having Marjiam in the middle, between Himself and Her. And He asks Her: «Did You hear Me, Mother?»

«Yes, Son, and My sadness has been added to Mary of Clopas'. She wept a little before entering the Temple...»

«I know, Mother. And I know why. But she must not weep, but pray.»

«Oh! She prays so much! In the past nights, in her tent, while her sons were sleeping, she prayed and wept. I could hear her through the thin partition of the branches. To see Joseph and Simon only a few steps away, so close, and yet so divided...! And she is not the only one to weep. Johanna, who seems so tranquil, has been weeping with Me...»

«Why, Mother?»

«Because Chuza... is behaving... very oddly. At times he seconds her in everything. At times he opposes her in everything. If they are alone where no one can see them, he is the usual exemplary husband. But if there are other people, of the Court naturally, with him, then he becomes dictatorial and disdainful of his meek wife. She does not understand why...»

«I can tell You. Chuza is Herod's servant. Understand Me, Mother. “Servant.” I will not tell Johanna, not to hurt her. But that is what he is. When he is not afraid of being blamed or jeered at by his sovereign, he is good Chuza. But when he fears that, he is no longer so.»

«It is because Herod is very angry because of Manaen and...»

«It is because Herod is mad with tardy remorse for yielding to Herodias. But Johanna already has so much happiness in life. Under her coronet, she must

wear her cilice.»

«Annaleah also weeps...»

«Why?»

«Because her fiancé is going astray... against You.»

«Tell her not to weep. It is a solution. A grace of God. Her sacrifice will bring Samuel back to Good. For the time being she will be left free from any pressure for marriage. I promised her to take her with Me. She will precede Me in death...»

«Son!...» Mary presses Jesus' hand, while Her face becomes deadly pale.

«Dear Mother! It is for the sake of men. You know. It is for the love of men. Let us drink our chalice with good will. Is that right?»

Mary stifles Her tears and replies: «Yes». A tortured heartrending «yes».

Marjiam looks up and says to Jesus: «Why do You say these dreadful things which grieve Mother? I will not let You die. I will defend You as I defended the lambs.»

Jesus caresses him and to raise the spirits of the two distressed ones, He asks the boy: «What will your little sheep be doing now? Do you not miss them?»

«Oh! I am with You! But I always think of them and I wonder: “Will Porphirea have led them to pasture? and will she watch that Foam does not go to the lake?” Foam is so lively, you know? Her mother calls her repeatedly... without avail! She does what she likes. And Snow, she is so greedy that she eats until she is sick. Do You know, Master? I know what it is to be a priest in Your Name. I understand better than the others. They (and he points at the apostles who are coming behind) they say so many big words, they make so many plans... for the future. I say: “I will be a shepherd for men, as I am for sheep. And that will be enough.” My Mummy and Yours told me yesterday such a lovely passage of the prophets... and She said to me: “Our Jesus is just like that.” And in my heart I said: “I will be like that, too.” Then I said to our Mother: “For the time being I am a lamb, later I will be a shepherd. Jesus instead is at present the Shepherd and He is also the Lamb. But You are always a ewe-Lamb, our dear, white, beautiful ewe-Lamb, Whose words are sweeter than milk. That is why Jesus is such a lamb: because He was born of You, the Little Lamb of the Lord.”»

Jesus stoops and kisses him fondly. He then asks him: «So you really want to be a priest?»

«Of course, my Lord! That is why I try to become good and learn so much. I always go to John of Endor. He treats me as a man and so kindly. I want to be the shepherd of the sheep both misled and not misled, and the doctor-shepherd of those which are wounded or suffer from fractures, as the Prophet says. Oh! How lovely!» and the boy takes a jump clapping his hands.

«What has this blackcap got that he is so happy?» asks Peter coming forward.

«He sees his way. Very clearly. Until the end. And I consecrate his vision with My approval.»

They stop before a high building, which, if I am not mistaken, is near the Ophel district, but in a more refined spot.

«Are we stopping here?»

«This is the house which Lazarus offered Me for our joyful banquet. Mary is already here.»

«Why did she not come with us? For fear of being jeered at?»

«Oh! No! I told her.»

«Why, Lord?»

«Because the Temple is more sensitive than a pregnant wife. As long as I can, and not out of cowardice, I do not want to collide with it.»

«It will be of no use to You, Master. If I were You, I would not only collide with it, but I would hurl it down from Moriah with all those who are in it.»

«You are a sinner, Simon. One must pray for one's fellow creatures, not kill them.»

«I am a sinner. But You are not... and... You ought to do it.»

«There is who will do it. After the measure of sin has been filled.»

«Which measure?»

«A measure that will fill the whole temple, overflowing in Jerusalem. You cannot understand... Oh! Martha! Open your house to the Pilgrim!»

Martha makes herself known and opens the door. They all go into a long hall ending in a paved yard with a single tree in each of the four corners. There is a large hall above the ground floor and from its open windows it is possible to see the whole town with its hills and slopes. I thus realise that the house is in the south or south-east side of the town.

The table has been laid for many guests. Many tables are set in parallel rows. About one hundred people can comfortably have a meal. Mary Magdalene, who was busy in the store room, arrives and prostrates herself before Jesus. Then Lazarus comes in with a happy smile on his drawn face. The guests enter little by little, some seem rather embarrassed, some are more sure of themselves. But the kindness of the women soon makes them all feel at home.

John, the priest, introduces to Jesus the two he has brought from the Temple. «Master, my good friend Jonathan and my young friend Zacharias. They are true Israelites without malice or ill-will.

«Peace be with you. I am happy to have you. The rite must be kept also in these pleasant customs. And it is lovely that the ancient Faith gives a friendly hand to the new Faith which has come from the same origin. Sit beside Me while we wait for dinner time.»

The patriarchal Jonathan speaks, while the young Levite looks around curiously, and seems amazed and somewhat shy. I think he wants to give himself easy manners, but in actual fact he is like a fish out of water. Fortunately Stephen comes to his aid and brings him, one after the other, the apostles and the main disciples.

The old priest says caressing his white beard: «When John came to me, his master, to show me that he had been cured, I wanted to meet You. But, Master, I hardly ever leave my enclosure. I am old... But I was hoping to see You before dying. And Jehovah has heard me. May He be praised! Today I heard You in the Temple. You excel the old wise Hillel. I do not want to doubt, nay, I cannot doubt that You are what my heart is expecting. But do You know what it is to have imbibed for almost eighty years the faith of Israel as it has become through centuries of... human handling? It has become our blood. And I am so old! To hear You is like hearing the water that gushes out of a cool spring. Oh! yes! A virgin water! But I... I am full of the tired water which comes from so far away... and has been made heavy by so many things. How can I get rid of that saturation and enjoy You?»

«By believing and loving Me. Nothing else is required for just Jonathan.»

«But I will die soon! Shall I have time to believe everything You say? I shall not even be able to follow all Your words or learn them from other people. Then?»

«You will learn them in Heaven. Only a damned soul dies to Wisdom. But he who dies in the grace of God draws life and lives in Wisdom. Whom do you think I am?»

«You can but be the Expected One, Whom the son of my friend Zacharias foreran. Did You meet him?»

«He was a relative of Mine.»

«Oh! So You are a relative of the Baptist?»

«Yes, priest.»

«He is dead... and I cannot say: "Poor man!" Because he died faithful to justice, after accomplishing his mission and because... Oh! The dreadful times we live in! Is it not better to go back to Abraham?»

«Yes. But more dreadful times will come, priest.»

«Do You think so? Rome, eh?»

«Not only Rome. Guilty Israel will be the first cause.»

«It is true. God is striking us. We deserve it. But also Rome... Have You heard of the Galileans killed by Pilate while they were offering a sacrifice? Their blood mingled with the victim's. Close to the very altar!»

«Yes, I heard about it.»

All the Galileans begin to riot because of that act of tyranny. They shout: «It is true that he was a false Messiah. But why kill his followers after striking him? And why at that moment? Were they bigger sinners perhaps?»

Jesus brings about peace and then says: «You are asking whether they were bigger sinners than many other Galileans and whether that is why they were killed? No, they were not. I tell you solemnly that they paid and many more will pay if you do not turn to the Lord. If you do not do penance, you will all perish alike, both in Galilee and elsewhere. God is indignant with His people. I tell you. You must not think that those who have been struck are the worst. Each of you should examine and judge himself, and no one else. Also the eighteen

people on whom the tower of Siloam fell and killed them, were not the most guilty in Jerusalem. I tell you. Do penance if you do not want to be crushed as they were, also in your souls. Come, priest of Israel. The meal is ready. It is your duty to offer and bless the food, because a priest is always to be honoured for the Idea which he represents and calls to our minds, and it is your duty because you are a patriarch among us, and we are all younger than you are.»

«No, Master! No! I cannot do that in Your presence! You are the Son of God!»

«You do offer incense before the altar! And do you perhaps not believe that God is there?»

«Yes, I do believe that! With all my strength!»

«Well, then? If you are not afraid of offering in the presence of the Most Holy Glory of the Most High, why should you be afraid in the presence of the Merciful One, Who took upon Himself human flesh to bring to you also the blessing of God before night comes to you? Oh! You people of Israel do not know that I covered with the veil of flesh My unendurable Divinity, so that man might approach God and not die thereof. Come, believe and be happy. I revere in you all the holy priests, from Aaron down to him who will be the last priest of Israel with Justice, you, perhaps, because priestly holiness really is languishing among us, like a forsaken plant.»

281. At the Temple They Are Aware of Ermasteus, of John of Endor and of Syntyche.

21st September 1945.

Jesus is on His way to Bethany with the apostles and disciples and is speaking to the disciples, whom He orders to part, so that the Judaeans will go through Judaea and the Galileans up Trans-Jordan announcing the Messiah.

The instruction raises some objections. I get the impression that Trans-Jordan did not enjoy a very good reputation among Israelites. They talk of it as if it were a pagan region. And that offends the disciples from that area, among whom the most influential is the head of the synagogue of the Clear Water and then a young man, whose name I do not know, and both vigorously defend their towns

and fellow citizens.

Timoneus says: «Come, my Lord, to Aera, and You will see how they respect You there. You will not find as much faith in Judaea, as there is there. Nay, I do not want to go there. Let me stay with You and send a Judaeans and a Galilean to my town. They will see how they believed in You on my word only.»

And the young man says: «I believed without even seeing You. And I looked for You after my mother had forgiven me. But I am happy to go back there, although that means being mocked by wicked citizens as I was once, and being reproached by good people for my behaviour in the past. But it does not matter. I will preach You through my example.»

«You are right. You will do as you said. And then I will come. And you, Timoneus, are right, too. So Hermas will go with Abel of Bethlehem in Galilee to announce Me at Aera, while you, Timoneus, will stay with Me. But I do not want such disputes. You no longer are Judaeans or Galileans: you are disciples. That is enough. That name and your mission make you all equal with regard to birthplace, rank, everything. In one thing only you may differ: in holiness. That will be individual and in the measure which each of you will be able to attain. But I would like you all to have the same measure: the perfect one. See the apostles? They were divided like you by race and other things. Now, after a little over a year of instruction, they are simply the apostles. Do the same, and as among you, priests are together with old sinners and rich people with former beggars, and young men with old venerable people, cancel likewise divisions brought about by belonging to this or that region. By now you have one Fatherland only: Heaven. Because you have set off on the way to Heaven each of his own free will. Never give My enemies the impression that you are hostile to one another. Sin is your enemy, nothing else.»

They proceed in silence for some time. Then Stephen approaches the Master and says: «I have something to tell You. I was hoping that You would ask me, but You did not. Yesterday Gamaliel spoke to me...»

«I saw him.»

«Are You not asking me what he told me?»

«I am waiting for you to tell Me, because a good disciple has no secrets from his Master.»

«Gamaliel... Master, come a little ahead with me...»

«Well... let us go. But you could have spoken in the presence of everybody...»

They move away a few yards. Stephen blushing says:

«I must give You a piece of advice, Master. Forgive me...»

«If it is good, I will accept it. Tell Me.»

«In the Sanhedrin, they know everything sooner or later. It is an institution with a thousand eyes and one hundred ramifications. They penetrate everywhere, see everything and hear everything. It has more informers than there are bricks in the walls of the Temple. Many live thus...»

«Spying. You may say so. It is the truth and I know. So? What has been said, more or less true, at the Sanhedrin?»

«Everything... has been said. I do not know how they can find out certain things. Neither do I know whether they are true... But I will tell You literally what Gamaliel told me: “Tell the Master to have Ermasteus circumcised or to send him away for good. It is not necessary to say anything else.”»

«In fact it is not necessary to say anything else. First of all because I am going to Bethany just for that and I will remain there until Ermasteus is fit to travel again. Secondly because no justification could demolish the prejudice and... standoffishness of Gamaliel, who is scandalised because I have with Me a man who is not circumcised in a member of his body. Oh! if he looked around and within himself! How many uncircumcised people in Israel!»

«But Gamaliel...»

«He is the perfect representative of old Israel. He is not wicked, but... Look at this pebble. I could split it, but I could not make it malleable. He is like that. He will have to be crushed in order to be recomposed. And I will do that!»

«Do You want to oppose Gamaliel? Be careful! He is powerful!»

«Oppose? As if he were an enemy? No. Instead of fighting against him, I will love him, satisfying one of his desires for his mummified brains and spreading on him a balm which will dissolve him to recompose him.»

«I will pray also that that may happen, because I am fond of him. Am I wrong?»

«No. You must love him by praying for him. And you will do that. I am sure you will. Nay, you will help Me to prepare the balm... However, you will tell

Gamaliel, to calm him, that I had already provided for Ermasteus and that I am grateful to him for his advice. Here we are at Bethany. Let us stop so that I may bless you all, because this is where we part.» And after joining the large group of apostles mingled with disciples, He blesses and dismisses them all, with the exception of Ermasteus, John of Endor and Timoneus. Then with the disciples left Jesus walks at a good pace the short distance to Lazarus' gate, which is already wide open to receive Him, He enters the garden raising His hand to bless the hospitable house, in the large park of which are the owners of the house and the pious women, who are laughing at Marjiam running along the paths adorned with the last roses. And with the owners and the women, also Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus come out of a path, when they hear the women shout; they also are guests of Lazarus, to be in peace with the Master. And they all make haste towards the Master; Mary with Her kind smile, and Mary of Magdala with her cry of love: «Rabboni!», and Lazarus limping, the two grave members of the Sanhedrin, and last, the pious women of Jerusalem and of Galilee: wrinkle-furrowed faces and smooth faces of young women and, as gentle as the face of an angel, the virginal face of Annaleah, who blushes in greeting the Master.

«Is Syntyche not here?» asks Jesus after the first greeting.

«She is with Sarah, Marcella and Naomi laying the tables. But here they are coming.»

And they come, in fact, with old Esther of Johanna, two faces marked by age and by sorrow, between two serene faces and the grave yet bright peaceful face of the Greek girl, different by race and by something which distinguishes her.

And I could not say that she is a real and true beauty. And yet her dark eyes softened by a nuance of very deep indigo, under a high and very noble forehead, are more impressive than her body, which is definitely more beautiful than her face. A slender but not meagre body, which is well proportioned and has a graceful gait and carriage. But it is her expression that strikes one. An intelligent, frank, deep look, which seems to inhale the whole world, selecting it, keeping what is useful, holy, good, and rejecting what is evil; a look which allows its very depths to be searched and from which her soul looks out to scan those approaching her. If it is true that it is possible to know an individual through his eyes, I say that Syntyche is a woman with unerring judgement and firm honest thoughts. She kneels also with the other women and waits to stand up until the Master tells her.

Jesus proceeds along the green garden as far as the porch before the house and then enters a hall where the servants are ready to serve refreshments and assist guests in the ablutions before meals. While all the women withdraw Jesus remains with the apostles in the hall, and John of Endor and Ermasteus go to the house of Simon Zealot to leave the bags they are carrying.

«Is the young fellow who has gone with John, the one-eyed man, the Philistine whom You have accepted?» asks Joseph.

«Yes, Joseph, he is. How do you know?»

«Master... Nicodemus and I have been wondering for some days how we know and how, unfortunately, the others of the Temple know about it. The fact is that we do know. Before the Tabernacles, in the meeting which is always held before such festivities, some Pharisees said that they knew for certain that among Your disciples, beside... – forgive me, Lazarus – known and unknown prostitutes and publicans – forgive me, Matthew of Alphaeus – and former galley-slaves, there were an uncircumcised Philistine and a heathen girl. With regard to the heathen girl, who is certainly Syntyche, one can understand how it became known, or at least guess so. The Roman made a great fuss about her and he became the laughing stock of his people and of the Jews, also because he searched for his runaway everywhere, complaining and threatening, and he even troubled Herod saying that she was hiding in Johanna's house and that the Tetrarch should order his steward to hand her back to her master. But it is strange, very strange that it should be known that among the many men who follow You, there is an uncircumcised Philistine, and a former galley-slave!... Do You not think so?»

«It is and it is not strange. I will provide for Syntyche and the former galley-slave.»

«Yes, do. Above all You ought to send John away. Your group of apostles is not a place for him.»

«Joseph, have you perhaps become a Pharisee?» asks Jesus severely.

«No... but...»

«And should I humiliate a soul which has been regenerated, because of the silly scruple of the worst Pharisaism? No, I will not! I will provide for his tranquillity. His, not Mine, I will watch over his perfecting as I watch over innocent Marjiam's. Really there is no difference in their spiritual ignorance! One speaks for the first time words of wisdom, because God has forgiven him, because he is

re-born in God, because God has embraced the sinner. The other speaks the same words, passing from a forlorn childhood to a boyhood, watched over by the love of man beside the love of God, and opens his soul to the sun like a corolla and the Sun enlightens him with Himself. His Sun: God. And one is about to speak his last words... Can your eyes not see that he is wearing himself out with penance and love? Oh! I would really like to have many Johns of Endor in Israel and among My servants. I would like you, too, Joseph and you, Nicodemus, to have hearts like his and above all I wish his informer had it, the vile snake that hides under the appearance of a friend and is acting as a spy before becoming an assassin. The snake that envies the bird its wings, and lays snares for it to tear them off and enthrall it. No! The bird is about to change into an angel. And even if it could tear them off, which it will never be able to do, once they were put on to its slimy body, they would change into wings of a devil. Every spy is already a devil.»

«But where can such a rogue be? Tell me so that I may go at once and tear his tongue out» exclaims Peter.

«You had better pull his poisonous teeth out» says Judas of Alphaeus.

«No! It's better to strangle him! So he will not be able to hurt in any way. Such people can always be harmful» remarks the Iscariot firmly.

Jesus stares at him and concludes: «... and can always lie. But no one must do anything against him. It is not worth while letting the bird perish, to deal with the snake. With regard to Ermasteus, I am staying here, in Lazarus' house, just for the circumcision of Ermasteus himself, who is embracing the holy religion of our people for My sake and to avoid the persecution of narrow-minded Jews. It is the passage from dark to Light. But it is not necessary to make Light come to a heart. But I have agreed to calm down the susceptibility of Israel and to show the true will of the Philistine to come to God. But I tell you, in the times of Christ, that is not necessary to belong to God. Will, love, and a righteous conscience are sufficient. And how can we circumcise the Greek woman? In which part of her spirit, if she was able to perceive God better than many people in Israel? It is true that among the people present many are in darkness as compared to those who are despised by you for being in darkness. In any case, both the informer and you, members of the Sanhedrin, can tell the people concerned that the scandal has been removed as from today.»

«With regard to whom? To all three?»

«No, Judas of Simon. With regard to Ermasteus. I will see to the other two. Have you anything else to ask Me?»

«No, Master.»

«Neither have I anything else to tell you. But I ask you to tell Me, if you know, what has happened to Syntyche's master.»

«Pilate shipped him back to Italy by the first boat available, to avoid having trouble with Herod and the Jews in general. Pilate is in a tight corner at present... and has enough worries» says Nicodemus.

«Is the news certain?»

«I can check on it, if You wish so, Master» says Lazarus.

«Yes. Do so. And then let Me know the true situation.»

«But in my house Syntyche is safe just the same.»

«I know. Israel also protects a slave who has run away from a foreign cruel master. But I want to know.»

«And I would like to know who is the spy, the informer, the pretty spy of the Pharisees... and I want to know, and this can be found out, who are the denouncing Pharisees. Let us have the names of the Pharisees and of their towns. I mean of the Pharisees who have done the lovely work of informing, following the betrayal of one of us, because we, old and new disciples, are the only ones to know things; a fine piece of work indeed it was to inform the Sanhedrin of the deeds of the Master, which are thoroughly honest, and who says or thinks the contrary is a devil and...»

«And that is enough, Simon of Jonah. It is an order.»

«And I obey, even if the veins of my heart should burst because of the effort. In the meantime the beauty of the day has gone...»

«No. Why? Has anything changed among us? So? O My Simon! Come here beside Me and let us talk of what is good...»

«They have come to tell us that dinner is ready, Master» says Lazarus.

«Let us go, then...»

282. Syntyche Speaks in Lazarus' House.**22nd September 1945.**

Jesus is sitting in the porched courtyard, which is inside the house in Bethany, the courtyard which I saw crowded with disciples on the morning of Christ's Resurrection. Sitting on a marble seat covered with cushions, leaning with His back against the wall of the house, surrounded by the owners of the house, by the apostles and the disciples John and Timoneus, together with Joseph and Nicodemus, and by the pious women, He is listening to Syntyche, who standing in front of Him, seems to be replying to a question of His. All the people present are more or less interested and are listening in various postures, some sitting on benches, some on the floor, some standing or leaning against the columns or the wall.

«... it was necessary. In order not to feel all the burden of my situation. It was necessary not to be convinced, to refuse to be convinced that I was all alone, a slave banished from my fatherland. It was necessary to think that my father, mother, brothers and the so fond and kind Ismene were not lost forever. And that, even if the whole world persisted in separating us, just as Rome had divided and sold us like baggage animals, although we were free citizens, a place would gather us all together again in the next life.

I had to think that our life is not only matter to be chained. On the contrary it has a free power that no chain can bind, except the voluntary one to live in moral disorder and in material revel. You call that "sin." Those who were my light in my night as a slave, give it a different definition. But they also agree that a soul nailed to a body by wicked corporal passions will not reach what you call the Kingdom of God, and we call living together with the gods in Hades. It is therefore necessary to abstain from falling into materialism and strive to achieve freedom from the body, procuring for oneself a heritage of virtue in order to possess a happy immortality and be reunited to those whom one loves.

And I could but think that the souls of the dead are not prevented from helping the souls of the living, so that a daughter could feel her mother's soul close to her and see her face and hear her voice speaking to the daughter, who could reply: "Yes, mother. So that I may come to you. Yes, not to upset you. Yes, not to make you weep. Yes, in order not to darken Hades where you are in peace.

For all that I will keep my soul free. It is the only thing which I possess and which nobody can take away from me. And I want to preserve it pure so that I may reason according to virtue." It was freedom and joy to think thus. And that is what I wanted to think. And act accordingly. Because it is only a half and sham philosophy to think one way and then act in a different one.

To think thus was to rebuild a fatherland also in exile. An intimate fatherland, with its altars, faith, teaching, affections in one's ego ... A great mysterious fatherland, yet not even so, because of the mystery of the soul which is consciously aware of the next world, even if at present it knows it only as a sailor at sea can see the details of the sea-coast in a misty morning: vaguely, in a rough draft, with only a few spots clearly outlined and which are enough for the tired seaman tortured by storms to say: "There is the harbour, peace is over there." The fatherland of souls, the place of our origin... the place of Life.

Because life is generated by death... Oh! I could understand only half of that until I heard one of Your words. Later it was as if a sunbeam struck the diamond of my thought. Everything became enlightened and I understood to what extent the Greek masters were right and how later they became confused, as they lacked one datum, only one, to solve the theorem of Life and Death. The datum was: The True God, the Lord and Creator of everything existing!

May I mention Him with my heathen lips? Of course I may. Because I come from Him, like everybody else. Because He gifted the minds of all men with intelligence, and the wiser ones with a superior intelligence, whereby they seem demigods with a superhuman power. Because He made them write the truths which are already religion, if not a divine religion like Yours, a moral one, capable of keeping souls "alive", not only for the period of time we remain here, on the earth, but forever.

Later I understood the meaning of: "Life is generated by death." He who said that was like one not completely drunk, whose intelligence had already become dullish. He spoke a sublime word, but did not understand it fully. I, forgive me my pride, Lord, I understood more than he did and I have been happy since that moment.»

«What did you understand?»

«That our present life is but the embryonal beginning of life and that true Life begins when death gives birth to us... to Hades, as a heathen, to eternal Life, as a believer in You. Am I wrong?»

«You are right, woman» approves Jesus.

Nicodemus interrupts: «But how did you hear of the Master's words?»

«He who is hungry, seeks food, sir. I was looking for my food. I was a reader, and as I was learned with a good voice and pronunciation, I was in a position to read much in the libraries of my masters. But I was not yet satisfied. I could feel that there was something else beyond the walls decorated with human science, and as a prisoner looking for gold, I hammered with my knuckles, I forced doors open to get out, to find... When I came to Palestine with my last master I was afraid I was going to fall into darkness... I was going instead towards the Light. The words of the servant at Caesarea were like as many blows with a pick which demolished the walls making wider and wider breaches through which Your Word came in. And I picked up those words and the news. And like a child stringing beads, I lined them up and adorned myself with them, drawing strength to become more and more purified in order to receive the Truth. I felt that by purifying myself I would find it. Even on this earth. At the cost of my life I wanted to be pure to meet the Truth, Wisdom, Divinity. My Lord, I am speaking foolish words. They are looking at me as if they were thoroughly confounded. But You asked me...»

«Speak. Go on speaking. It is necessary.»

«I resisted external pressure with strength and moderation. I could have been free and, happy, according to the world, if I had wanted. But I would not barter knowledge for pleasure. Because it is of no avail to have other virtues without wisdom. He, the philosopher, said: “Justice, moderation and strength separated from knowledge are like painted scenery, virtues befitting slaves, without anything firm and real.” I wanted to have real things. The master, an imbecile, used to speak of You in my presence. Then the walls seemed to become a veil. It was enough to want to tear the veil and join the Truth. I did it.»

«You did not know what you were going to find» says the Iscariot.

«I knew how to believe that the god rewards virtue. I did not want gold, or honours, or physical freedom, no, not even that. But I wanted the truth. I asked God for that or to die. I wanted to be spared the humiliation of becoming an “object”, and even more, of agreeing to become one. Renouncing everything which is corporal in looking for You, o Lord, because a research through senses is never perfect – as You noticed when seeing You I ran away, deceived as I was by my eyes – I abandoned myself to God Who is above us and within us and

informs souls of Himself. And I found You because my soul led me to You.»

«Yours is a heathen soul» remarks once again the Iscariot.

«But a soul always has something divine within itself, particularly when it has striven to be preserved from error... It therefore tends to things of its own nature.»

«Are you comparing yourself to God?»

«No.»

«Why do you say that, then?»

«What? Are you, a disciple of the Master, asking me? Me, a Greek woman and only recently freed? Do you not listen to Him when He, speaks? Or is the ferment in your body such that it blunts your mind? Does He not always say that we are the children of God? So we are gods if we are the children of the Father, of His and our Father, of Whom He always speaks to us. You may reproach me for not being humble, but not for not believing or not paying attention.»

«So you think that you are worth more than I am? Do you think that you have learned everything from your Greek books?»

«No, neither one nor the other. But the books of wise men, wherever they come from, have given me the minimum necessary to support myself. I do not doubt that an Israelite is worth more than I am. But I am happy with the destiny which comes to me from God. What else could I wish for? In finding the Master I found everything. And I think that was my destiny, because I really see a Power watch over me and it has fixed a great destiny for me and I have done nothing but comply with it, as I feel it is a good one.»

«Good? You have been a slave, and of cruel masters... If the last one, for instance, had recaptured you, how could you have complied with your destiny, you very wise woman?»

«Your name is Judas, is it not?»

«Yes, and so?»

«And so... nothing. I want to remember your name besides your irony. Bear in mind that irony is not advisable even in virtuous people... How would I have complied with my destiny? Perhaps I would have killed myself. Because in certain cases it is better to die than to live, although the philosopher says that

that is not right and it is impious to procure welfare by oneself because only the gods have the right to call us to stay with them. And this waiting for a sign of the gods to do it, has always kept me from doing it, even in the chains of my sad fate. But now, in being recaptured by my filthy master, I would have seen the supreme sign. And I would have preferred to die rather than live, I, too, have my dignity, man.»

«And if he recaptured you now? You would still be in the same situation...»

«Now I would not kill myself. Now I know that violence against the flesh does not injure the spirit that does not consent. I would now resist until I were bent by force and killed by violence. Because I would take that as a sign from God that through such violence He would call me to Himself. And I would now die tranquilly, knowing that I would be only losing what is perishable.»

«You have replied very well, woman» says Lazarus and Nicodemus gives his approval as well.

«Suicide is never allowed» says the Iscariot.

«Many are the things which are forbidden, but the prohibition is not complied with. But, Syntyche, you must consider that as God has always guided you, so He would have prevented you from doing violence to yourself. Go now. I will be grateful to you if you look for the boy and bring him here» says Jesus kindly.

The woman bows to the ground and goes away. They all follow her with their eyes.

Lazarus whispers: «She is always like that! I fail to understand how what in her has been “life” is instead “death” for us Israelites. If You still have the chance of examining her again, You will see that whilst Hellenism corrupted us, though we already possessed Wisdom, it saved her. Why?»

«Because the ways of the Lord are wonderful. And He opens them to whoever deserves it. And now, My friends, I will dismiss you because night is falling. I am happy that you all have heard the Greek woman speak. As you have ascertained that God reveals Himself to the best people, you must conclude that it is hideous and dangerous to exclude all those who are not Israelites from the people of God. Bear that in mind for the future... Do not grumble, Judas of Simon. And you, Joseph, do not have unjustified scruples. None of you are contaminated for approaching a Greek woman. Make absolutely sure that you do not approach or give hospitality to the devil. Goodbye, Joseph; goodbye,

Nicodemus. Will I be able to meet you again, while I am here? Here is Marjiam... Come, boy, say goodbye to the heads of the Sanhedrin. What do you say to them?»

«Peace be with you... and I say also: pray for me at the hour of incense.»

«You have no need for that, child. But why just at that hour?»

«Because the first time I entered the Temple with Jesus, He spoke to me of the evening prayer... Oh! It is so beautiful!...»

«And will you pray for us? When?»

«I will pray... in the morning and in the evening. That God may preserve you from sin during the day and the night.»

«And what will you say, my child?»

«I will say: “Most High Lord, let Joseph and Nicodemus be true friends of Jesus.” And that will be enough, because he who is a true friend, does not grieve his friend. And he who does not grieve Jesus is sure to possess Heaven.»

«May God preserve you thus, child!» say the two members of the Sanhedrin caressing him. They then greet the Master, the Blessed Virgin and Lazarus individually and all the others in a body and go away.

283. The Mission of Four Apostles in Judaea.

23rd September 1945.

Jesus is on His way back from an apostolic trip in the neighbourhood of Bethany. It must have been a short trip, because they are not carrying any food bags.

They are speaking to one another saying: «The idea of Solomon, the boatman, was a good one, Master, wasn't it?»

«Yes, it was.»

The Iscariot, of course, disagrees with the others: «I do not see much good in it. He gave us what is no longer of any use to him as a disciple. There is no reason

why he should be praised...»

«A house is always useful» says the Zealot gravely.

«Yes, if it were like yours. But what is his house? An unhealthy shanty.»

«It is all Solomon has» retorts the Zealot.

«And as he grew old in it without aches and pains, we shall be able to stay there now and again. What do you expect? All the houses to be like Lazarus'?» adds Peter.

«I do not expect anything. I cannot see the necessity of that gift. Once you are there you can be in Jericho just as well. There are only a few stadia between the two places. And what are a few stadia for the like of us, who are compelled to wander about all the time, like persecuted people?»

Jesus intervenes before the others lose all patience as clear signs indicate is about to happen: «Solomon, in proportion to his riches, has given more than anybody else. Because he has given everything. He gave it out of love. He gave it to let us have a shelter in case we are caught in the rain, or in a flood, in that not very hospitable area and above all in case the Judaeen ill-will should become so strong as to advise us to stay on the other side of the river. And that is with regard to the gift. That a humble, coarse but so faithful and willing disciple has been able to be so generous, which is clear evidence of his firm will to be a disciple of Mine for good, fills Me with great joy. I can truly see that many disciples, with the few lessons which they have received from Me, have excelled you who have received so many. You cannot sacrifice, particularly you, Judas, even what costs nothing: your personal opinions. You maintain yours stubbornly, unyieldingly.»

«You said that the struggle against oneself is the hardest...»

«And thus you want to tell Me that I am wrong when I say that it costs nothing. Is that right? But you have understood perfectly well what I mean! According to men, and you really are a true and proper man, only what is marketable is valuable. One's ego cannot be sold for money. Except... when a man sells himself to someone hoping to make a profit. An illicit trade like the one stipulated by a soul with Satan, even worse. Because it involves not only the soul but also man's thoughts, or judgement or freedom, you may call it as you like. There are some wretched people like that... But for the time being, let us forget about them. I praised Solomon because I see how good his deed is. And that is enough.»

There is silence, then Jesus resumes speaking: «In a few days' time Ermasteus will be able to walk without any trouble. And I will go back to Galilee. But you will not all come with Me. Some will remain in Judaea and will come up later with the Judaeen disciples, so that we shall all be reunited for the feast of the Dedication.»

«Such a long time? Oh dear! Whose turn will it be?» the apostles ask one another.

Jesus hears their whispering and replies: «It will be the turn of Judas of Simon, of Thomas, Bartholomew and Philip. But I did not say that you will have to be in Judaea until the feast of the Dedication. On the contrary I want you to gather the disciples and inform them to be there for the feast of the Dedication. So you will now go and look for them, gather them together and tell them; in the meantime you will watch over them and assist them and later you will come up after Me, bringing with you those you have found, and leaving instructions for the others to come. We have now friends in the main places in Judaea and they will do us the favour of informing the disciples. And on your way up to Galilee through Trans-Jordan, remember that I will be going through Gerasa, Bozrah, Arbela, as far as Aera, and collect also those who did not dare to come to Me asking for a miracle or doctrine, and later have regretted not doing so. Bring them to Me. I will stay in Aera until you arrive.»

«In that case we had better go at once» says the Iscariot.

«No, you will leave the evening before My departure and will stay with Jonah at Gethsemane until the following day, and then you will set out for Judaea. You will thus be able to see your mother and help her just now that she is selling her farm produce.»

«She learned to do that by herself years ago.»

«Don't you remember that last year she could not do without you at vintage time?» asks Peter rather slyly.

Judas becomes as red as a poppy and looks ugly in his anger and shame. But Jesus provides against any possible reply by saying: «A son is always of help and comfort to his mother. She will not see you again until Passover and after Passover. So go and do as I tell you.»

Judas does not reply to Peter, but he gives vent to his anger against Jesus: «Master, do You know what I must tell You? That I am under the impression that

You want to get rid of me, or at least keep me away from You, because You suspect me and You wrongly think that I am guilty of something, because You lack charity towards me, because...»

«Judas! That is enough! I could tell you many words. But I say only: “Obey!”» Jesus is majestic in saying so. Tall as He is, with shining eyes and severe countenance, He strikes everybody with fear...

And Judas trembles. He goes behind all the apostles, while Jesus, all alone, walks ahead of them. The speechless apostolic group is thus between them.

284. Jesus Leaves Bethany for Trans-Jordan.

24th September 1945.

«Lazarus, My dear friend, I ask you to come with Me» says Jesus appearing at the door of the hall where Lazarus is reading a roll, half reclining on a little bed.

«I will come at once, Master. Where are we going?» asks Lazarus getting up immediately.

«Into the country. I need to be all alone with you.»

Lazarus looks at Him with a worried expression and asks: «Have You sad news to give me secretly? Or... No, I do not even want to think of that...»

«No, I only wish to seek advice from you and not even the air must be aware of what we shall say. Order a wagon, because I do not want you to get tired. When we are out in the open country I will speak to you.»

«In that case I will drive it myself. So no servant will know what we say.»

«Yes, do that.»

«I am going at once, Master. I'll soon be ready» and he goes out.

Jesus also goes out after standing somewhat pensive in the middle of the magnificent hall. While engrossed in thought, He mechanically moves two or three objects and picks up a roll which had fallen on to the floor, and when putting it in its place in a cabinet, because of His inborn instinct for order, which

is so deeply rooted in Jesus, He remains with His arm raised, looking at the strange art of some objects lined up in the cabinet, which are different from the current art in Palestine. By the embossed work and design imitating the ornaments of the temples of ancient Greece and of funeral urns, they appear to be very old amphoras and cups. What He sees beyond the articles themselves, I do not know... He leaves the hall and goes into the inner yard, where the apostles are.

«Where are we going, Master?» they ask when they see Jesus tidy His mantle.

«Nowhere. I am going with Lazarus. You will stay here and wait for Me. I shall soon be back.»

The Twelve look at one another. They are not very happy...

Peter says: «Are You going alone? Be careful...»

«Do not be afraid. While waiting, do not be idle. Teach Ermasteus, that he may have a better knowledge of the Law and be good company to one another, without arguments or rudeness. Bear with and love one another.»

He sets out towards the garden and they all follow Him. A closed cart soon arrives with Lazarus in it.

«Are You going in that cart?»

«Yes, so that Lazarus may not tire his legs. Goodbye, Marjiam. Be good. Peace to you all.»

He climbs into the cart, which grinding the pebbles of the avenue leaves the garden and turns into the main road.

«Are You going to the Clear Water, Master?» Thomas shouts after Him.

«No, I am not. Once again I tell you to be good.»

The horse starts at a steady trot. The road going from Bethany to Jericho runs through the country, which is becoming bare. The more they descend towards the plain, the more the fading of the greenery in the fields becomes noticeable.

Jesus is pensive. Lazarus is silent and intent only on driving the cart. When they are down in the plain, a fertile plain, which is ready to nourish the seed of future corn, and where all the vineyards seem to be asleep, like a woman who has recently given birth to her fruit and is resting after her pleasant labour, Jesus

beckons Lazarus to stop. Lazarus stops at once and leads the horse into a side road, which takes to houses far away... and he explains: «We shall be safer here than on the main road. These trees will conceal us from the eyes of many people.» In fact a thicket of low trees acts as a screen against the curiosity of passers-by. Lazarus is standing before Jesus, waiting.

«Lazarus, I must send away John of Endor and Syntyche. You can see that both prudence and charity advise Me to do so. It would be a dangerous test and useless grief for both of them to be aware of the persecutions set in motion against them... and which, for at least one of them, could bring about most grievous surprises.»

«In my house...»

«No. Not even in your house. Perhaps they would not be troubled materially. But they would be humiliated morally. The world is cruel. It crushes its victims. I do not want those two beautiful and powerful souls to get lost like that. So, as one day I joined Ishmael to Sarah, I will now join My poor John to Syntyche. I want him to die in peace, I do not want him to be left alone, and he must go away feeling that he is being sent elsewhere, not because he was formerly a galley-man, but because he is the proselyte disciple who can be sent away to announce the Master. And Syntyche will help him... She is a beautiful soul and will be a great strength in the future Church and for the future Church. Can you advise Me where to send them? I do not want them to stay in Judaea or in Galilee and not even in the Decapolis, where I go with My apostles and disciples. Nor in the heathen world. So, where? Where, so that they may be safe and usefull?»

«Master... I... how can I give You advice!»

«No, tell Me. You love Me, you do not betray Me, you love those whom I love, you are not narrow-minded like the others.»

«I... well... I would advise You to send them where I have some friends. To Cyprus or to Syria. Make Your choice. I have trustworthy people in Cyprus. And even more in Syria!... I have also a little house, watched over by a manager, who is as faithful as a pet lamb. Our old Philip! He will do for my sake anything I tell him. And, if You do not mind, those who are persecuted by Israel and are dear to You, will be my guests as from now on, and will be safe in the house... Oh! It is not a palace! It is a house where Philip lives alone with a nephew, who looks after the gardens at Antigonium. The beloved gardens of my mother. We have

kept them as a remembrance of her. She had taken there the plants of her Judaeian gardens... plants of rare essences... Mother!... How much good she did to the poor with them... It was her secret domain... My mother... Master, I will soon be going to say to her: “Rejoice, my good mother. The Saviour is on the earth.” She was expecting You...» Tears stream down Lazarus' drawn face. Jesus looks at him and smiles. Lazarus recovers his strength: «But let us speak of You. Do You think it is a good place?»

«I think it is. And I thank you once again, also on their behalf. You have relieved Me of a heavy burden...»

«When will they leave? I am asking so that I may prepare a letter for Philip. I will say that they are two friends of mine, from here, in need of peace. And that will suffice.»

«Yes, that is enough. But, I beg you, not even the air is to be aware of this. You can see that yourself. They are spying upon Me...»

«I know. I will not mention it even to my sisters. But how will You take them there? You have the apostles with You...»

«I will now go up as far as Aera without Judas of Simon, Thomas, Philip and Bartholomew. In the meantime I will teach Syntyche and John thoroughly, so that they may go with large provisions of Truth. I will then go down to lake Merom and later to Capernaum. And when I am there, I will send the four apostles away once again, on some other mission, and in the meantime I will send the two off to Antioch. That is what they are compelling Me to do...»

«To be afraid of Your own people. You are right... Master, it grieves me to see You worried...»

«But your kind friendship is of great comfort to Me... Lazarus, I thank you... I am leaving the day after tomorrow and I will be taking your sisters away. I need many women disciples to conceal Syntyche amongst them. Johanna of Chuza also is coming. From Merom she will go to Tiberias, where she will be spending the winter months. Her husband has decided so to have her close to him, because Herod is going back to Tiberias for some time.»

«It will be done as You wish. My sisters are Yours, as I am, as my houses, servants and belongings are. Everything is Yours, Master. Make use of it to do good. I will prepare Your letter for Philip. It is better if I give it to You personally.»

«Thank you, Lazarus.»

«That is all I can do... If I were well... Cure me, Master, and I will come.»

«No, My dear friend ... I need you as you are.»

«Even if I do not do anything?»

«Yes, even so. Oh! My Lazarus!» and Jesus embraces and kisses him.

They get on the cart and go back.

Lazarus is now silent and engrossed in thought, and Jesus asks him why.

«I was thinking that I am going to lose Syntyche. I was attracted by her science and goodness...»

«Jesus will gain her...»

«That is very true. When shall I see You again, Master?»

«In spring.»

«Shall I not see You again until spring? Last year You were here with me for the feast of the Dedication.»

«This year I will satisfy the apostles. But next year I will be with you quite a lot. It is a promise.»

Bethany appears in the October sunshine. They are about to arrive when Lazarus stops the horse to say: «Master, You are right in sending away the man from Kerioth. I am afraid of him. He does not love You. I do not like him. I never liked him. He is sensual and greedy. And thus he may commit any sin. Master, it was he who denounced You.»

«Have you any proof?»

«No, I have not.»

«Well, in that case, do not judge. You are not very clever at judging. Remember that you considered your Mary as inexorably lost... Do not say that it was My merit. She sought Me first.»

«That is true, too. However, beware of Judas.»

Shortly afterwards they enter the garden, where the apostles are curiously awaiting them.

The absence of four apostles, and above all of Judas, makes the remaining group more intimate and happy. The group which leaves Bethany on a clear October morning on its way to Jericho, to cross to the other side of the Jordan, is just like a family, the heads of which are Jesus and Mary. The women are gathered round Mary, only Annaleah is absent from the group of the women disciples, which comprises the three Maries, Johanna, Susanna, Eliza, Marcella, Sarah and Syntyche. Peter, Andrew, James and Judas of Alphaeus, Matthew, John and James of Zebedee, Simon Zealot, John of Endor, Ermasteus and Timoneus, are grouped round Jesus, while Marjiam jumping about like a little kid, goes to and fro from one group to the other, which are only a short distance apart. Although laden with heavy bags, they proceed joyfully in the mild sunshine, through the country so solemn in its rest.

John of Endor proceeds with some difficulty under the weight hanging from his shoulders.

Peter notices it and says: «Give your useless load to me since you have decided to carry it round. Were you missing it?»

«The Master told me to bring it.»

«Did He? How lovely! Why?»

«I don't know. Yesterday evening He said to me: "Pack your books again and follow Me with them."»

«Lovely indeed!... But if He told you, it must be for a good reason. Perhaps it is for that woman. How accomplished she is! Are you as learned?»

«Almost as much as she is. She is very clever.»

«But you are not going to follow us with this load all the time, eh?»

«Oh! I don't think so. I don't know. But I can carry it myself.»

«No, my dear friend. I don't want you to be taken ill. You are looking very poorly, you know?»

«I know. I feel as if I were dying.»

«Don't be silly! At least wait until We arrive in Capernaum. It is so lovely now that we are by ourselves without that... Curse my tongue! I have failed once again in my promise to the Master!... Master? Master?»

«What do you want, Simon?»

«I have spoken ill of Judas, and I had promised You that I would not do it any more. Forgive me.»

«Yes, I do. But try not to do it again.»

«I still have 489 times to be forgiven by You...»

«What are you talking about, brother?» asks Andrew who is obviously utterly amazed.

And Peter, whose placid countenance is humorously bright, twisting his neck under the weight of John of Endor's bag, exclaims: «Don't you remember that He said that we have to forgive seventy times seven. So I am still to be forgiven 489 times and I must keep an accurate account of them...»

They all laugh; Jesus cannot help smiling either. But He replies: «You had better keep count of all the times you are capable of being good, you big boy.»

Peter approaches Him and embracing with his right arm Jesus' waist he says: «My dear Master! How happy I am to be with You without... Come on, admit it! You are happy, too... And You know what I mean. We are all friendly here. Your Mother is here. There is also the boy. We are going towards Capernaum. The season is beautiful... Five good reasons to be happy. Oh! And it is beautiful to travel with You! Where are we staying tonight?»

«At Jericho.»

«Last year we met the Veiled woman there. I wonder what has happened to her... I am rather curious to know... And we found also the man of the vineyards...» Peter's laughter is so loud that it is contagious. They all laugh remembering the scene of the meeting with Judas of Kerioth.

«You are really incorrigible, Simon!» remarks Jesus reproachingly.

«I did not say anything, Master. But I had to laugh remembering his countenance when he found us there... in his vineyards...» Peter laughs so wholeheartedly that he is compelled to stop, while the others proceed laughing against their will.

Peter is joined by the women. Mary asks him kindly: «What is the matter with you, Simon?»

«Ah! I cannot tell You or I will be lacking in charity once more. But, Mother, tell me, since You are so wise. If I throw out innuendos against someone, or worse still, if I utter slander about someone, I obviously commit a sin. But if I laugh at something, at an event, which is known to everybody, something which makes people laugh, for instance, if we remember the surprise, the embarrassment and excuses of a liar when he was found out and we laugh again as we did in the past, is that still wrong?»

«It is an imperfection against charity. It is not a sin like backbiting, or slander or innuendo, but it is still lack of charity. It is like a thread pulled out of a piece of cloth. It does not tear or wear the cloth out, but it affects the firmness and beauty of the fabric and makes it subject to tears and holes. Do you not think so?»

Peter rubs his forehead and feeling rather humiliated he replies: «I do. I had never thought of that.»

«Think about it now and do not do it any more. Laughter may be more offensive to charity than slaps in the face. Has someone made a mistake? We have found someone guilty of lying or of other faults? So? Why remember it? Why remind other people? Let us cover with a veil the faults of our brother, saying: "If I were the culprit, would I like another person to remember my fault or remind other people of it?" There are people who blush in their inmost heart, Simon, and suffer so much because of it. Do not shake your head. I know what you want to say. But, believe Me, also guilty people may blush thus. You must always think: "Would I like that done to me?" You will then see that you will no longer sin against charity. And you will always have so much peace in your heart. Look how happily Marjiam is jumping and singing, because his heart is not worried. He does not have to think about itineraries, expenses or what to say. He knows that someone else takes care of all that on his behalf. Do the same yourself. *Abandon everything to God. Also judgement on other people.* As long as you can be like a child led by God, why take upon yourself the burden of deciding and judging? The day will come when you must be judge and arbitrator and then you will say: "Oh! How easier and less dangerous it was formerly" and you will say that you were foolish in burdening yourself before the time with so much responsibility. How difficult it is to judge other people! Did you hear what Syntyche said some days ago? "*A research through senses is never perfect.*" She is quite right. We very often judge according to the reactions of our senses. That

is, with the utmost imperfection. Give up judging...»

«Yes, Mary. I sincerely promise You. But I do not know all the beautiful things which Syntyche knows!»

«And are you worried about that, man? Do you not know that I want to get rid of all that, in order to have only what you know?»

«Do you? Why?»

«Because science may support you on the earth, but through wisdom you gain Heaven. Mine is science, yours is wisdom.»

«But by means of your science, you were able to come to Jesus! So it is a good thing.»

«It is mixed with so many errors, that I would like to divest myself of it and clothe myself with wisdom only. I do not want ornate vain dresses. Let the severe inconspicuous dress of Wisdom be mine, as it clothes like an everlasting garment not what is corruptible, but what is immortal. The flame of Science flickers and quivers, The flame of Wisdom shines unvaryingly and steadily and is like the Divinity from which it originates.»

Jesus has slackened His pace in order to hear. He turns round and says to the Greek woman: «You must not yearn to divest yourself of everything you know. But you must select from your knowledge what is a particle of eternal Intelligence conquered by minds of undeniable value.»

«Have, therefore, those minds repeated within themselves the myth of the fire stolen from the gods?»

«Yes, woman. But it was not stolen in this case. They were able to pick it when the Divinity grazed them with its fire, caressing them as specimens, spread among decayed mankind, of what man is, gifted with reason.»

«Master, You should tell me what I must keep and what I must leave. I would not be a good judge. And then You ought to fill with the light of Your Wisdom, the spaces left empty.»

«That is what I intend doing. I shall point out to you to what extent is wise what you know and I will develop it from that point to the end of the true idea. So that you may know for certain. And that will be useful also to those who are destined to have many contacts with the Gentiles in future.»

«We shall not understand anything, my Lord» moans James of Zebedee.

«You will understand little, for the time being, but one day you will understand both the present lessons and their necessity. And you, Syntyche, will expound to Me those points which are most obscure to you. And I will clarify them when we stop to rest.»

«Yes, my Lord. It is the desire of my soul which merges in Your desire. I am the disciple of the Truth, You the Master. It is the dream of all my life: to possess the Truth.»

285. **Arrival at Ramoth with the Merchant from the Other Side of the Euphrates.**

25th September 1945.

After walking a long way across a fertile plain on the other side of the Jordan – and it is pleasant to walk in the serene mild season as it is now at the end of October – and after resting in a little village lying at the foot of the lower slopes of a rather bulky chain of mountains, some summits of which can really be called mountains, Jesus sets out once again, following a long caravan of many quadrupeds and well armed men, to whom He had previously spoken while they were watering their animals at the fountains in the square. They are mostly tall swarthy men, with typical Asian features. The head of the caravan is riding a very strong mule and is armed to the teeth and weapons are hanging from his saddle. And yet he had great respect for Jesus.

The apostles ask Jesus: «Who is he?»

«A rich merchant from the other side of the Euphrates. I asked him where he was going and he replied politely. He will be passing through the towns where I intend to go. Which is providential in these mountains, when we have the women with us.»

«Are You afraid of something?»

«I am not afraid of being robbed, as we possess nothing. But it would be enough to frighten the women. A handful of robbers will never attack so strong a

caravan, which will be most useful to us because we shall also find out the best passes and shall be able to cross over the difficult ones. He asked Me: “Are You the Messiah?” and when he heard that I was, he said: “I was in the Courtyard of the Heathens some days ago and I heard You more than I could see You, because I am a small man. Well, I will protect You and You will protect me. I have a very valuable load.”»

«Is he a proselyte?»

«I do not think so. But perhaps he is of our extraction.»

The caravan proceeds slowly, as if they did not want to exhaust the strength of the quadrupeds by going too far. It is therefore easy to follow them and sometimes it is necessary to stop as the drivers let the laden animals pass one by one holding them by their halters in the most difficult spots. Although a true and proper mountainous area, it is fertile and well cultivated. Perhaps the high mountains to the north act as a protection against the cold northern winds or the harmful eastern ones and that helps cultivation. The caravan marches along a stream which flows into the Jordan and is rich in water which comes down from I wonder which top. The view is beautiful and becomes more and more beautiful as one climbs up, stretching westwards across the plain of the Jordan and reaching, beyond it, the graceful hills and mountains of northern Judaea, while to the east and north the view changes continuously, stretching far out and wide, or showing overlapping rounded hills and green or rocky mountain tops, which seem to obstruct the road like the sudden wall of a labyrinth.

The sun is about to set behind the mountains of Judaea, colouring sky and slopes with a deep red, when the rich merchant, who has stopped to let the caravan pass, says to Jesus: «We must reach the village before night. But many of Your people look tired. This is a long hard leg. Let them mount the spare mules. They are quiet animals. In any case they will be resting all night and the weight of a woman is no burden to them.»

Jesus agrees and the man orders the caravan to stop to let the women mount the mules. Jesus makes John of Endor get on horseback as well. And those on foot, including Jesus, hold the reins to make the women feel safer. Marjiam wants to be... a man, and although he is exhausted, he refuses to go on horseback with anyone and he takes one of the reins of the Blessed Virgin's mule, Who is thus between Jesus and the boy, and he walks bravely.

The merchant has remained near Jesus and he says to Mary: «See that village,

Donna? That is Ramoth. We will stop there. I am well known at the hotel because I come this way twice a year, and I go along the coast, also twice a year to purchase and sell. My life is a hard one. But I have twelve children and they are all young. I got married late. The last one was nine days old when I left him. And he will have cut his first teeth when I see him.»

«A lovely family...» comments Mary, and She adds: «May Heaven preserve it for you.»

«As a matter of fact I cannot complain of its help although I do not really deserve it.»

Jesus asks him: «Are you at least a proselyte?»

«I should be... My ancestors were true Israelites. Then... we became acclimatised there...»

«A soul becomes acclimatised in one atmosphere only: in Heaven's.»

«You are right. But You know... My great grandfather married a woman who was not an Israelite. His children became less faithful... The sons of his children once again married women who were not from Israel and their children were respectful only of their Jewish names; because we are of Jewish extraction. Now I, a grandson of grandsons... I am nothing. Being in touch with everybody I have taken after everyone, with the result that I belong to no one.»

«That is not a good reason and I can prove it to you. If going along this road, which you know to be a good one, you should meet five or six people who said to you: “No, don't go this way!”, “Go back”, “Stop”, “Go eastwards”, “Turn westwards”, what would you do?»

«I would say: “I know that this is the right road and the shortest, and I am not going to leave it.”»

«Likewise: if you are negotiating some business and you know the best way to do it, would you listen to those who either through boasts or interested cunning advised you to act differently?»

«No. I would follow the method which my experience tells me is the best.»

«Very well. Millennia of faith are behind you, a descendant of Israel. You are neither stupid nor uneducated. So why are you influenced by contacts with everybody in matters of faith, whereas you reject them when money or road

safety is concerned? Do you not think it is dishonourable also from a human point of view? To place God after money and the road...»

«I do not postpone God. But I have lost sight of Him...»

«Because business, money, your life are your gods. But it is still God Who allows you to have such things... Then, why did you go to the Temple?»

«Out of curiosity. Coming out of a house where I had negotiated some goods, I saw a group of men pay their respects to You and I remembered the words I had heard at Ashkelon from a woman who made carpets. I asked who You were, as I suspected You might be the One of Whom the woman had spoken to me. And when I found out that it was You, I followed You. I had done my business for that day... Then I lost sight of You. I saw You once again at Jericho. But only for a moment. Now I have found You again... That's it...»

«So God has joined and interlaced our ways. I have no gifts to offer you to thank you for your kindness. But before leaving you I hope to be able to give you a present, unless you leave Me beforehand...»

«No, I will not. Alexander Misace does not take back what he offers! Here we are. The village begins after that turn. I will go ahead. We will meet at the hotel» and he spurs his mule leaving almost at a gallop on the edge of the road.

«He is an honest unhappy man, Son» says Mary.

«And You would like him to be happy according to Wisdom, would You not?»

And they smile kindly at each other in the first shadows of the evening.

...The pilgrims are all gathered in a large hall of the hotel, waiting to go to bed, in the long October evening. The merchant is in a corner, all by himself, intent on his accounts. Jesus, with His group, is in the opposite corner. There are no other guests. Braying, neighing and bleating can be heard coming from the stables, which makes one assume that there are other people in the hotel. Perhaps they are already in bed.

Marjiam has fallen asleep in Our Lady's arms, forgetting all of a sudden that he was «a man». Peter is dozing and is not the only one. Also the whispering elderly women are half asleep and are silent. Jesus, Mary, Lazarus' sisters, Syntyche, Simon Zealot, John and Judas are well awake.

Syntyche is searching John of Endor's bag looking for something. But she

prefers to come close to the others and listen to Judas of Alphaeus who is speaking of the consequences of the exile in Babylon and concludes: «...and perhaps that man is still a consequence of that. Every exile is a ruin...». Syntyche nods unintentionally but does not say anything and Judas of Alphaeus concludes: «However, it is strange that one can so easily divest oneself of what has been a treasure for centuries to become entirely new, particularly in matters of religion, and a religion like ours...»

Jesus replies: «You must not be surprised if you see Samaria in the lap of Israel.»

There is silence... Syntyche's dark eyes are staring at Jesus' serene profile. She looks at Him intensely, but does not speak. Jesus perceives her glance and turns round to look at her.

«Have you not found anything to your liking?»

«No, my Lord. I have got to the point that I am no longer able to reconcile the past with the present, former ideas with present ones. And I feel as if it were a defection because my former ideas have helped me to have the present ones. Your apostle spoke the truth... But my ruin is a happy one.»

«What is your ruin?»

«All my faith in heathen Olympus, my Lord. But I am somewhat upset because on reading Your Scriptures – John gave me them and I read them because there is no possession without knowledge – I found out that also in your history... of the beginning, shall I say, there are events which do not differ much from ours. Now, I would like to know...»

«I have already told you: ask Me and I will answer your questions.»

«Is everything wrong in the religion of the gods?»

«Yes, woman. There is but one God, Who does not originate from anybody else and is not subject to human passions and needs: one Only, Eternal, Perfect God, the Creator of everything.»

«I believe that. But I want to be able to reply to the questions which other heathens may ask me not in a way which does not admit any discussion, but by discussing in order to be convinced. I, by myself and by virtue of beneficent paternal God, have given myself informal answers, but sufficient to give peace to my spirit. But I was willing to reach the Truth. Others may be less anxious

than I am in that respect. But everybody ought to be keen in such research. I do not want to be inactive with souls. I would like to give what I have received. But I must know in order to be able to give. Grant me knowledge and I will serve You in the name of love. Today, on the way, while I was watching the mountains and certain views reminded me of the chains of Hellas and of the history of my Country, by association of ideas the myths of Prometheus and Deucalion crossed my mind... You have something similar in the fulmination of Lucifer, in the infusion of life into clay, in the Flood of Noah. Light concomitances, yet they are a remembrance... Now tell me: how could we be aware of them if there was no contact between you and us, if you certainly had them before we did, and although we had them, we do not know how we got them? We still ignore one another, in many things. So how could we, thousands of years ago, have legends which are remembrances of Your Truth?»

«Woman, you ought to be the last one to ask Me. Because you have read works which could answer your questions by themselves. Today, by association of ideas, from the remembrance of your native mountains you have gone on to the remembrance of native myths and comparisons. Is that right. Why?»

«Because my awakened thought remembered.»

«Very well. Also the souls of the very ancient people who gave a religion to your land remembered. Vaguely, as someone who is imperfect can do, someone separated from the revealed religion. But they have always remembered. There are many religions in the world. Now, if we had here in a clear picture all their details, we would see that there is something like a golden thread, lost in much mud, a thread with many knots in which fragments of the real Truth are enclosed.»

«But do we not all come of the same stock? You say so. So why were the very ancient ones, who came of the original stock, why were they not able to bring the Truth with them? Was it not unjust to deprive them of it?»

«You have read Genesis, have you not? What have you found? A complex sin at the beginning, a sin embracing the three states of man: matter, thought, spirit. Then a fratricide. Then a double homicide to counterbalance the work of Enoch to keep light in hearts, then corruption, when the sons of God, out of lust, married the daughters of man. And notwithstanding the purification by the Deluge and the remaking of the race from good seed, not from stones as your myths state, likewise the first clay modelled by God to His image and in the

shape of man was endowed with life through the work of God by the infusion of vital Fire, and not through the theft of vital fire by man, there was a fresh outburst of pride, an insult to God: “Let us touch the sky” and the divine curse: “Let them be scattered and let them no longer understand one another.”... And the only stock became divided, like water clashing against a rock is divided into little streams and does not come together again, and the race was divided into races. Mankind driven away by its sin and by divine punishment was scattered and never came together again, carrying with itself the confusion created by pride. But souls remember. There is always something left within them. And the most virtuous and wise see a light indistinctly, a feeble light in the dark of myths: the light of Truth. It is the remembrance of the Light seen before life, which inspires them with some truth, in which are fragments of the revealed Truth. Is that clear to you?»

«Only partly. But I will think about it. Night is the friend of those who meditate and collect their thoughts.»

«Well, let us go and collect our thoughts. Let us go, My friends. Peace to you, women. Peace to you, My disciples. Peace to you, Alexander Misace.»

«Goodbye, my Lord. God be with You» replies the merchant bowing...

286. From Ramoth to Gerasa.

26th September 1945.

The peculiarity of this village lying on a raised rocky platform in the middle of a crown of mountain tops, some of which are higher, some lower than it, appears in all its typical beauty in the rather hard light of a somewhat windy morning. It looks like a huge granite tray with buildings, little houses, bridges, fountains lying on it, for the amusement of a gigantic child.

The houses seem to be engraved in calcareous rock which is the basic matter in the area. They are square shaped and built with blocks laid one upon another, some are not plastered, the blocks of some are still in their rough natural state, they really look like the little houses decorating a Christmas crib built with cubes by a big clever boy.

And around the little village one can contemplate its fertile country, covered with trees, variously cultivated, so that from above it looks like a carpet of squares, trapezia, triangles, some of which are brown owing to the recently hoed earth, some emerald green because of the grass grown after autumn rain, some reddish because of the last leaves of vineyards and orchards, some grey-green because of poplars or willows, or enamel green because of oaks and carobs, or bronze-green owing to cypresses and conifers. Beautiful, really beautiful!

And one can see roads which, like ribbons parting from a knot, run from the village to the remote plain, or towards the high mountains and dive under woods or divide with a grey line the green meadows or brown ploughed fields.

And there is a pleasant stream of water, which is silvery beyond the village towards its spring, and blue fading to jade on the other side, where it flows down to the valley between gorges and slopes, and it appears and disappears playfully, and it grows stronger and stronger and bluer and bluer as its water increases, thus preventing the reeds and grass, which have grown in its bed during the droughty months, from tinging it green and it thus reflects the sky, after burying the stalks in its deep water.

The sky is unreal blue: a precious scale of deep enamel blue, without the least impure flaw in its wonderful texture.

And the caravan sets off again, with the women still on horseback, because, as the merchant says, the road is very difficult after the village and it is necessary to walk fast in order to get to Gerasa before night. They are all muffled up and they proceed swiftly, as they are well rested, along a road which climbs up through wonderful woods, skimming the highest slopes of a solitary mountain, which rises like a huge block resting on the shoulders of the other mountains under it. A real giant as one can see in the highest parts of our Apennines.

«Galaad» says the merchant, pointing at it; he has remained near Jesus Who is leading the Virgin's little mule holding its reins. And the merchant adds: «After this the road is much better. Have You ever been here?»

«No, never. I wanted to come here in springtime. But I was rejected at Galgala.»

«You rejected? How dreadful!»

Jesus looks at him and is silent.

The merchant has taken Marjiam up on his saddle, as the boy with his short legs

was finding it difficult to keep up with the quick pace of the horses. And Peter is well aware that it is a quick pace! He is plodding along with all his might, imitated by the others, but he is always outdistanced by the caravan. He is perspiring, but is happy because he can hear Marjiam laugh, he sees that Our Lady is resting and the Lord is happy. He puffs and blows while speaking to Matthew and his brother Andrew, who are left behind with him, and he makes them laugh saying that if in addition to his legs, he had wings, he would be happy that morning. He got rid of all loads, like the rest, tying the bags to the saddles of the women's mounts, but the road is really frightful, the stone being slippery with dew. The two Jameses with John and Thaddeus are more clever as they are keeping up with the pace of the women's mules. Simon Zealot is speaking to John of Endor. Timoneus and Ermasteus are also leading mules.

At last the worst of the road is over and an entirely different scenery is displayed to their amazed eyes. The Jordan valley has definitely disappeared. To the east one's eyes rove over an imposingly wide tableland, where only a ripple of hills attempt to rise in order to interrupt the evenness of the landscape. I would never have thought there could be any such thing in Palestine. It seems that after the rocky storm of mountains, the storm itself has calmed down and become petrified in a huge billow which has been left hanging between the bottom level and the sky, with only one remembrance of its original fury in the tiny lines of hills, the foam of the crests solidified here and there, whilst the water of the billow has spread out over a wonderful and magnificent plain surface. And one reaches this bright peaceful area through a last gorge, as wild as the abyss between two clashing billows, the last two waves of a sea-storm, in the depths of which there is a fresh foaming torrent flowing westwards and coming from the east, in a tormented enraged way between rocks and waterfalls in dire contrast with the remote peace of the huge tableland.

«The road will be good now. If You do not mind I will give the order to stop» says the merchant.

«I am being guided by you, man. You know that.»

They all dismount and spread out along the slopes in search of wood to cook the food, and of water for their tired feet and parched throats. The animals, once relieved of their loads, graze the thick grass or go down to the limpid torrent to water. The smell of resins and roast meat rises from the little fires lit to cook some lambs.

The apostles have lit a fire of their own on which they heat some salt fish after washing it in the cool water of the torrent. But the merchant sees them and he comes bringing a little skinned lamb, or a little kid, whichever it may be, and makes them accept it. And Peter gets ready to roast it after stuffing it with fresh mint.

The meal is soon prepared and is soon over. And under the perpendicular midday sunshine they resume marching along a better road, which follows the torrent north-eastwards in a wonderfully fertile and well cultivated area, rich in sheep and swine herds, which run away grunting before the caravan.

«That walled town is Gerasa, my Lord. A town with a great future. It is now developing, and I don't think I am wrong in saying that it will soon be competing with Joppa, Ashkelon, with Tyre and many more towns, in beauty, trade and wealth. The Romans have realised its importance, on this road which from the Red Sea, that is, from Egypt goes to the Euxine Sea through Damascus. And they are helping the Gerasenes to build... They are sharp-sighted and have a good nose. For the time being it only has a very good trade, but later!... Oh! It will be beautiful and rich! A little Rome, with temples, piscinae, circuses, thermal baths. I only traded with them. But now I have bought much ground, to build emporia, which I will sell later at a high price, and perhaps I will build a real gentleman's house there, where I can stay in my old days, when Balthazar, Nabor, Felix and Sydmia will be able to look after and manage respectively the emporia at Sinope, Tyre, Joppa and Alexandria on the mouth of the Nile. In the meantime the other three boys will grow up and I will give them the emporia at Gerasa, Ashkelon and perhaps at Jerusalem. And the rich and beautiful girls will be sought-after and they will make very good matches and give me many grandchildren...» the merchant has golden and rosy day-dreams for the future.

Jesus asks him calmly: «And then?»

The merchant rouses himself, looks at Him perplexedly and then says: «And then? That is all. Then death will come... It is sad. But that is it.»

«And will you leave all business? Your emporia? Your affections?»

«My Lord! I would not like to. But as I was born I must also die. And I shall have to leave everything» and he heaves such a long sigh as to push the caravan forward with it...

«But who told you that once you are dead you leave everything?»

«Who? The facts of life! Once you are dead... that is all. You have no hands, no eyes, no ears...»

«You are not only hands, eyes and ears.»

«I am a man. I know. I have other things. But they all end with death. It is like the setting of the sun. Its setting destroys it...»

«But dawn creates it once more, or rather it presents it again. You are a man, you said so. You are not an animal like the one you are riding. An animal, once it is dead, is really finished. Not you. You have a soul. Do you not know? Do you not even know that any more?»

The merchant hears the sad reproach, a sad but kind reproach, and he lowers his head whispering: «I still know that...»

«So? Do you not know that the soul survives?»

«I know.»

«Well, then? Do you not know that it still has an activity in the next life? A holy activity if it is holy. A wicked one if it is wicked. And it has its sentiments. Oh! It has them indeed! Loving ones, if it is holy. Hateful ones, if it is damned. Hateful against whom? Against the causes of its damnation. In your case: your business, the emporia, your exclusively human affections. Loving affections for whom? For the same things. And what blessings can a soul bring upon its children and their activity when it is in the peace of the Lord!»

The man is pensive. He says: «It is late. I am old, now.» And he stops his mule.

Jesus smiles and replies: «I will not force you. I advise you» and He turns round to look at the apostles, who in the halt before entering the town are helping the women to dismount and are picking up their bags.

The caravan sets out again and soon enters the busy town through the gate watched over by towers.

The merchant goes back to Jesus: «Do You want to remain with me?»

«If you do not drive Me away, why should I not want to?»

«Because of what I said to You. I must make You, the Holy One, sick.»

«Oh! no! I have come for people like you, whom I love because you are the most needy. You do not know Me as yet. But I am the Love who passes by

begging for love.»

«So You do not hate me?»

«I love you.»

Tears shine in the man's deep eyes. But he says smiling: «In that case we shall stay together. I am stopping at Gerasa on business for three days. I leave the mules here and take camels. I have a caravan stage in the major halting places and a servant looks after the animals I leave in each place. And what will You do?»

«I will evangelize on the Sabbath. I would have left you, if you had not stopped, because the Sabbath is sacred to the Lord.»

The man knits his brows, is pensive and with some difficulty he agrees: «...Of course... It is true. It is sacred to the God of Israel. It is sacred... it is indeed...» He looks at Jesus: «If You allow me, I will consecrate it to You.»

«To God. Not to His Servant.»

«To God and to You, by listening to You. I will do my business today and tomorrow morning. And then I will listen to You. Are You coming to the hotel now?»

«I have no option. I have the women and I am not known here.»

«Here it is, it is mine. It is mine because my stables are here year after year. I have large rooms for the goods. If You wish...»

«May God reward you. Let us go.»

287. Preaching at Gerasa.

27th September 1945.

He thought He was unknown! When He sets foot outside Alexander's building the following morning, He finds people already waiting for Him. Jesus is with the apostles only. The women and disciples are still in the house, resting. The people greet Him gathering round Him and they say that they know Him

because a man He had freed from demons has spoken to them about Him. The man is not there now because he has gone on with two disciples, who passed by some days ago.

Jesus listens kindly to what they say and at the same time He walks through the town in some areas of which the noise of building yards is dreadfully loud. Masons, diggers, stone-cutters, blacksmiths, carpenters are working building, levelling, filling gaps, chiselling stones for walls, working iron for various purposes, sawing, planing, making poles out of strong trunks. Jesus passes by watching, He crosses a bridge on a babbling torrent flowing in the middle of the town, with a row of houses on each side pretending to form a riverside. He goes up to the higher part of the town, which is built on a rising ground so that the south east side is higher than the northern one, but they are both higher than the town centre, which is divided by the little stream.

The view from the point where Jesus has stopped is beautiful. The whole town is displayed before the onlooker, and behind it, on the eastern, southern, western sides there is a horse-shoe shaped chain of low green hills, whereas to the north the eye roves over a wide open plain, with a ground elevation on the horizon, so tiny that it cannot even be called a hill, but it is beautifully golden in the morning sunshine, which tinges with a yellowish hue the leaves of the vines which cover the ground, as if it intended to mitigate the melancholy of the withering leaves with the splendour of a touch of gold.

Jesus is admiring the view and the people of Gerasa are looking at Him. He wins the regard of the people by saying to them:

«This town is really beautiful. Make it beautiful also in justice and holiness. The hills, the stream, the green plain were given to you by God. Rome is now helping you to have homes and beautiful buildings. But it is up to you only to have your town called holy and just. A town is what its citizens make it. Because a town is a part of society closed within its walls, but it is the citizens that make the town. A town in itself does not commit sin. The stream, the bridge, the houses, the towers cannot sin. They are matter, not souls. But those who are within the town walls, in houses, shops, those who cross the bridge or bathe in the stream they can all sin. If a town is factious and ruthless, people say: "It is a very bad town." But that is wrong. It is not the town, it is the citizens who are very bad. Those individuals by joining together become one complex thing, as well as one thing only, which is called "town." Now listen. If in a town ten thousand inhabitants are good, and only one thousand are not good, can we say

that that town is wicked? No, we cannot. Likewise: if in a town of ten thousand inhabitants there are many parties and each struggles to favour his own, can we say that that town is still united? No, we cannot. And do you think that that town will thrive? No, it will not.

You people of Gerasa are now all united striving to make your town great. And you will succeed because you all want the same thing and you vie with one another in achieving your purpose. But if tomorrow opposed parties should arise among you and one said: "No, it is better to expand eastwards" and another party said: "Not at all. We will build in the north where the plain is", and a third one should say: "Neither here nor there. We all want to live close together in the centre, near the river", what would happen? It would happen that the work you have started would stop, those who have lent capitals would withdraw them, those who intended to settle here would go to another town with more agreeable people, and what you have already done would go to rack and ruin, as it would be exposed to the inclemency of the weather, before being completed, as a result of the quarrels of citizens. Is that right or not? You say it is, and you are right. So the harmony of the citizens is required for the welfare of the town, and consequently of the citizens themselves, because the welfare of a society is the welfare of its members.

But there is not only the society of which you are thinking, the society of citizens, of fellow-countrymen, or the little dear family society. There is a vaster society, an infinite one: the society of spirits.

Each living man has a soul. The soul does not die with the body, but survives forever. The idea of God, the Creator, who gave each man his soul, was that all the souls of men should be gathered in one place only, in Heaven, forming the Kingdom of Heaven, whose monarch is God and whose blissful subjects were to be all men, after a holy life and a placid limbo of expectancy. Satan came to divide and upset, destroy and grieve God and spirits. And he set sin in the hearts of men and with sin he brought death to the body at the end of its existence, hoping to give death to spirits as well. But the death of spirits is their damnation, which is still existence, but devoid of what is true life and eternal joy, that is, devoid of the beatific vision of God and of His eternal possession in eternal light. And Mankind became divided in its desires, like a town divided by opposed parties. And it was thus brought to ruin. I said elsewhere to those who were accusing Me of expelling demons with the assistance of Beelzebub: "Every kingdom divided in itself will be brought to ruin." In fact if Satan

expelled himself, he and his gloomy kingdom would ruin.

I have come, for the love that God has for mankind created by Him, to remind people that one Kingdom only is holy: the Kingdom of Heaven. And I have come to preach it, so that the better people may go towards it. Oh! I would like everybody, even the worst ones, to come to it, becoming converted, freeing themselves from the demon who keeps them enslaved, either openly, through corporal and spiritual possession, or secretly through a mere spiritual one. That is why I move about curing sick people, expelling demons from possessed people, converting sinners, forgiving in the name of the Lord, preaching the Kingdom, working miracles to convince you of My power and prove that God is with Me. Because no one can work a miracle unless God is his friend. So if I expel demons with the power of God, and I cure sick people, I cleanse lepers, convert sinners, announce and preach the Kingdom and I call people to it in the name of God, and God's compliance with Me is clear and indisputable, so that only disloyal enemies may assert the contrary, it is a sign that the Kingdom of God is among you and must be established because the hour of its foundation has come.

How is the Kingdom of God established in the world and in hearts? By going back to the Mosaic Law or by becoming acquainted with it if one is ignorant of it and, above all, by abiding by it absolutely, in every event and moment of our life. Which is that Law? Something so severe as to be impracticable? No. It is a set of ten holy easy precepts, which even a really morally good man feels he must respect, even if he lives in the most impervious forest of mysterious Africa. It says: "I am the Lord Your God, you shall have no gods except Me.

You shall not utter the name of God in vain.

You shall keep the Sabbath according to the commandment of God and to the needs of the human body.

Honour your father and mother so that you may have a long life and be blessed both on the earth and in Heaven.

You shall not kill.

You shall not steal.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

You shall not covet your neighbour's wife.

You shall not covet your neighbour's goods.”

Which good natured soul, contemplating what is around him, even if he is a savage, will not say: “All this was not formed by itself. Therefore there must be One, more powerful than nature and than man himself, who made this”? And he worships the Powerful One Whose Most Holy Name he may or may not know, but he feels He must exist. And he has such reverence before Him, that when he utters the name which he has given Him or has been taught to utter to name Him, he trembles with respect and he feels that he prays when uttering it reverently. In fact it is a prayer to utter the Name of God with the intention of worshipping Him or making Him known to those who do not know Him.

Likewise, out of moral prudence alone every man feels that he must grant some rest to his limbs, so that they may resist as long as his life lasts. By deeper reason, a man who knows the God of Israel, the Creator and Lord of the Universe, feels that he must consecrate his bodily rest to the Lord, so that he may not be like a beast of burden which rests, when tired, on litter crushing fodder with its strong teeth.

Blood also calls for love for those from whom we originate, as we can see in that colt that is now running braying towards its mother which is coming from the market. It was playing in the herd, it saw its mother, it remembers it was fed by her and licked with loving care, defended and warmed by its mother, and see? It rubs her neck with its tender nostrils and jumps joyfully rubbing its young crupper against the sides that carried it. It is a duty and a pleasure to love one's parents. And there is no animal which does not love the mother which gave birth to it. What? Will man be more vile than worms living in mud?

A morally good man does not kill. He has a strong dislike of violence. He feels that it is not lawful to take anybody's life, and that God only, Who gave it, has the right to take it. He abhors homicide.

Likewise, he who is morally sound does not take advantage of other people's property. He prefers to eat plain bread with a clear conscience near a silvery fountain, rather than have a rich roast which is the fruit of a theft. He prefers to sleep on the ground with his head on a stone and friendly stars above him, pouring peace and comfort on his honest conscience, rather than toss about in a stolen bed.

And if he is morally sound, he is not eager for more women, which are not his, and he will not cowardly disgrace the nuptial bed of his neighbour. And he will consider his friend's wife as a sister and will not cast lustful glances at her, as no one does at a sister.

A man with a righteous soul, even if only naturally righteous, with no other knowledge of God but what comes to him from his honest conscience, will never take the liberty of giving false witness, as he would consider that the same as homicide and theft, which it is. But his lips are as honest as his heart, and his glances are honest, so he does not desire his neighbour's wife. He does not crave for anything, as he knows that that is the first incentive to sin. And he is not envious. Because he is good. A good man is never envious. He is happy in his lot.

Do you think that this law is so exacting as to be impracticable? Do not wrong yourselves! I am sure that you will not do that. And if you do not, you will establish the Kingdom of God within yourselves and in your town. And you will be happily joined one day to those whom you loved and who like you have gained the eternal Kingdom in the everlasting joy of Heaven.

But we have within us passions, which are like citizens closed within the circle of town walls. It is necessary for all the passions of men to want the same thing: that is, holiness, Otherwise some will tend to Heaven in vain, if others leave the doors unguarded and let the seducer enter or counteract the actions of part of the spiritual citizens through disputes or laziness, making the interior part of the town perish and abandoning it to nettles, poison, couchgrass, snakes, scorpions, mice and jackals, and owls, that is, to wicked passions and to Satan's angels. You must be unceasingly vigilant, like sentries placed at the walls, to prevent the Evil one from entering where we want to build the Kingdom of God.

I solemnly tell you that as long as the strong man watches in arms the hall of his house, he is sure of everything which is in it. But if one stronger than he is comes, or if he leaves the door unguarded, then the stronger man will defeat him and disarm him, and when he is deprived of the weapons on which he relied, he loses heart and surrenders and the stronger man makes him a prisoner and takes his spoils. But if man lives in God, through loyalty to the Law and justice practised holily, God is with him, I am with him, and no harm can befall him. Union with God is the weapon which no strong man can overcome. Union with Me is certainty of victory and of abundance of eternal virtues through which he will be given an eternal seat in the Kingdom of God. But he who turns his back on Me or becomes My enemy, rejects thereby the weapons and certainty of My

Word. He who rejects the Word, rejects God. He who rejects God invokes Satan. He who invokes Satan destroys what he had to conquer the Kingdom.

Therefore, he who is not with Me is against Me. And he who does not cultivate what I have sown, will reap what the Enemy has sown. He who does not harvest with Me, dissipates and will be poor and nude when he comes to the Supreme Judge, Who will send him to the master to whom he sold himself by preferring Beelzebub to Christ.

Citizens of Gerasa: build the Kingdom of God within yourselves and in your town.»

The trilling voice of a woman is clearly heard like the song of a skylark above the whispering of the admiring crowd, and it sings a new beatitude, that is the glory of Mary: «Blessed be the womb that bore You and the breast that suckled You.»

Jesus turns towards the woman who extolled His Mother admiring Her Son. He smiles, because He is pleased with the praise for His Mother. But He then says: «More blessed are those who listen to the word of God and practise it. Do that, woman.»

He then blesses the crowds and goes towards the country, followed by the apostles who ask Him: «Why did You say that?»

«Because I tell you solemnly that in Heaven they do not use the same measure as is used on the earth. And My Mother will be blessed not so much because of Her immaculate soul as for listening to the word of God and practising it through obedience. It was a prodigy of the Creator “that Mary's soul was immaculate.” And He is to be praised for that. But the “let what you have said be done to Me” is a prodigy of My Mother. Her merit therefore is great. So great that the Saviour of the world came only because of Her capability of listening to God, speaking through Gabriel's lips, and because of Her will to practise the word of God, without weighing the difficulties and the immediate and future sorrows connected with Her assent. You can thus see that She is My blessed Mother not only because She bore and suckled Me, but because She listened to the word of God and practised it through obedience. But let us go home now. My Mother knew that I was going to be out for a short while and She may be worried because of My delay. We are in a half-pagan country. But in actual fact it is better than others. But let us go. And let us go round the walls to avoid the crowds which would keep Me back. Come down quick behind this thicket...»

288. The Sabbath at Gerasa.

28th September 1945.

The hours of the day are long when one does not know what to do. And those who are with Jesus do not know what to do on that Sabbath, in a town where they have no acquaintances, in a house where they do not feel at home because of different languages and habits, without taking into account the Jewish prejudices which keep them apart from Alexander Misace's camel-drivers and servants. Many, therefore, have stayed in bed or are dozing in the sun that makes the large square yard of the house comfortably warm. It is a yard suited to receive caravans, as it is fitted with basins and rings fixed to the walls or columns of a rustic porch, which runs along the four sides, with many stables and lofts for hay and straw on three sides. The women are in their rooms. I do not see even one of them.

Marjiam amuses himself also in the closed yard, watching the work of the stable-men, who curry mules, change litters, examine hoofs, fasten loose horse-shoes, or, what is of greater interest to him because it is something entirely new, he is spellbound watching how the cameleers deal with the camels, preparing in advance the load for each animal, in proportion to each of them, balancing it, and how they make a camel kneel down and rise in order to load and unload it, rewarding each one with a handful of dry legumes, which I think are broad beans, and at the end they gave them carobs, which the men also chew with relish.

Marjiam is utterly amazed and he looks round to find someone with whom he may share his amazement. But he is disappointed because adults are not interested in camels. They are either speaking to one another or dozing. He goes to Peter who is sleeping blissfully with his head resting on soft hay, and shakes his arm. Peter half opens his eyes and asks: «What is it? Who wants me?»

«I do, Come and see the camels.»

«Let me sleep. I have seen so many of them... Ugly animals.»

The boy then goes to Matthew, who is checking his accounts, as he is the

treasurer during this trip: «You know, I have been to see the camels. They eat like sheep, did you know? And they kneel down like men and they look like boats moving up and down. Have you seen them?»

Matthew, who has lost his count owing to the interruption, replies sharply: «Yes» and resumes counting his money.

Another disappointment... Marjiam looks round... There is Simon Zealot speaking to Judas Thaddeus... «How lovely camels are! And how good! They loaded and unloaded them and they lay down on the ground so that the cameleer should not have to work too hard. And they eat carobs. The men also were eating them. I would like... But I cannot make myself understood. Come with me...» and he takes Simon by the hand.

Simon, who is engrossed in peaceful conversation with Thaddeus, replies absent-mindedly: «Yes, dear... Go... and watch that you do not hurt yourself.»

Marjiam is astonished... Simon has not replied to the point. The boy is almost weeping. He goes away down-heartedly and leans against a column...

Jesus comes out of a room and sees that he is sulky and alone. He goes towards the boy and lays a hand on his head. «What are you doing all alone and so sad?»

«No one will listen to me...»

«What did you want from them?»

«Nothing I was speaking of the camels... They are lovely... I like them. It must be like being on a boat to be up there... And they eat carobs; the men also eat them...»

«And you want to go up there and eat carobs. Come, let us go to the camels» and Jesus takes him by the hand and goes to the end of the yard with the child, who has become cheerful once again.

He goes straight to a cameleer and greets him with a smile. The man bows to Him and continues examining his animal, adjusting its halter and reins.

«Man, do you understand Me?»

«Yes, Lord. I have known Your people for twenty years.»

«This boy has a big desire: to climb up on a camel... And a little one: to eat a carob» and Jesus smiles once again more lively.

«Your son?»

«No, I have no children. I am not married.»

«You, so handsome, so strong, You have not found a woman?»

«I have not looked for one.»

«You have never felt the desire of a woman?»

«No. Never.»

The man looks at Him and is spellbound. He then says: «I have nine children at Ischilo... I go: one son. I go: another son. Always.»

«Do you love your children?»

«They are of my blood! But my work is hard. I am here, my children are there. We are far apart... But I do it for their bread. Do you understand?»

«I do. So you can understand the boy who would like to mount a camel and eat carobs.»

«Yes. Come. Are you afraid? No? Good. Lovely boy! I have one, too, like you. Dark like you. Here. Take and hold it tight» and he puts into Marjiam's hand the strange handle which is in the front part of the saddle. «Hold it. I will come on now. And the camel will stand up. You are not afraid, eh?»

And the man climbs up on the high saddle, he makes himself comfortable and spurs the camel, which stands up obediently with a heavy pitch.

Marjiam laughs happily. And he is all the more happy because the cameleer has put a delicious carob into his mouth. The camel ambles along the yard, then the driver puts it into a trot, finally, seeing that Marjiam is not afraid, he shouts something to one of his companions, who opens the very wide door at the rear of the yard and the cameleer disappears with his load in the green country.

Jesus goes back towards the house and enters a large room where the women are. He smiles so happily that Mary asks Him: «What has happened, Son, that You are so happy?»

«I am as happy as Marjiam who is galloping on a camel. Come out so that we may see him coming back.»

They all go out into the yard and sit on the low wall near the basins. The

apostles who are not sleeping approach them. Those who are at the windows in the rooms upstairs, look down, they see the group and go down to join them. Their shrill youthful voices, they are in fact the voices of John and of the two Jameses, awake also Peter and Andrew and arouse Matthew. They are now all together because John of Endor and the two disciples have also joined the group.

«But where is Marjiam? I don't see him» asks Peter.

«He has gone for a run on a camel. None of you would listen to him... I saw that he was so sad and I took care of him.»

Peter, Simon and Matthew remember: «Of course! He was talking about camels... and carobs. But I was sleepy!»; «I had to check my accounts as I wanted to inform You of what I had received from the Gerasenes and what I had given to the poor»; «And I was speaking of faith with Your brother.»

«It does not matter. I saw to it. But, incidentally, I tell you that to take care of children's games is also love... But now let us talk of something else. The town is full of merriment. The only remembrance of our Sabbath is general mirth. So it is better to stay indoors. So much so because if they want, they can find us as they know where we are. There is Alexander inspecting his camels. I will now tell him that one is missing through My fault.» And Jesus hastens towards the merchant and speaks to him.

They come back together. The merchant says: «Very well. He will enjoy himself and a run out in the sun will do him good. You may rest assured that the man will treat him well. Calipius is a clever man. In exchange for the run, I ask You to tell me something. Last night I was thinking of Your words... those I heard at Ramoth, which You exchanged with the woman, and those You spoke yesterday. And I thought I was climbing up a high mountain, like those where I live, the tops of which reach up to the clouds. You were carrying me higher and higher. I was under the impression of being caught by an eagle, one of those eagles of our highest mountain, the first to emerge from the Deluge. I saw entirely new things, of which I had never thought before, all made of a light... And I understood them. Then I became confused. Tell me more.»

«What shall I tell you?»

«I don't know... Everything was so beautiful. What You said about meeting again in Heaven... I understood that we will love there in a different way, and yet it will be the same. For instance: we shall not be worried as we are now, it

will be as if we were one family only: one for all and all for one. Am I wrong?»

«No. On the contrary! We shall one family also with the living. Souls are not separated by death. I am speaking of the just. They form one large family. Just imagine a large temple in which some worship and pray, and some work. The former pray also for those who are working, the latter work for those who are praying. The same applies to souls. We work on the earth. They help us with their prayers. But we must offer our sufferings for their peace. It is a chain which does not break. It is Love that ties those who were to those who are. And those who are must be good to be able to join those who were and want us to be with them.»

Syntyche makes an involuntary gesture, which she soon cheeks. But Jesus notices it and invites her to come out of her habitual self-restraint.

«I was thinking... I have been thinking about it for some days, and if I must tell the truth, I am worried, because I feel that if I believe in Your Paradise, I will lose my mother and sisters forever...» a sob breaks the voice of Syntyche, who stops to stifle tears.

«What thought worries you so much?»

«I now believe in You. I can only think of my mother as a heathen. She was good... Oh! very good! And my sisters, too. Little Ismene was the best daughter there ever was on the earth. But they were heathens... Now, when I was like them, I thought of Hades and I used to say: "We will meet there again." Now Hades no longer exists. There is Your Paradise, the Kingdom of Heaven for those who have served the True God in justice. And what about those poor souls? It is no fault of theirs if they were born in Greece! None of the priests in Israel ever came to say: "Our God is the True God." So? Are their virtues and sufferings worth nothing? Will they be in eternal darkness and separated from me forever? I tell You: it is a torture! I seem to have almost disowned them. Forgive me, my Lord... I am weeping...» and she falls on her knees weeping disconsolately.

Alexander Misace says: «There You are! I also was wondering whether, if I become a just man, I will ever find my father, mother, my brothers and friends...»

Jesus lays His fingers on Syntyche's brown-haired head and says: «One is at fault when one knows the Truth, but persists in Error. Not when one is

convinced of being in the Truth, and no voice has ever come to say: “The Truth is what I am bringing you. Forsake your chimeras for this True God and you will gain Heaven.” God is just. Can you believe that He will not reward virtue which was perfected all by itself in the corruption of the heathen world? Do not worry, My daughter.»

«What about the original sin? And their nefarious cult? And...»

More objections would come from the Israelites to grieve Syntyche's already desolate soul, if Jesus with a gesture did not impose silence.

He says: «The original sin is common to everybody, whether one is from Israel or not. It is not a peculiarity of heathens. The pagan cult will be sinful after the Law of Christ has been spread throughout the world. Virtue will always be virtue in the eyes of God. And in virtue of My union with the Father I say, and I say this in His name, translating His Most Holy Thought into words, that the ways of God's merciful power are manifold, and they are so intent on giving joy to virtuous people that they will remove barriers between souls, and peace will be given to those who deserve peace. Not only, but I say that in future those who follow the religion of their ancestors with justice and holiness, convinced of being in the Truth, will not be disliked and punished by God. Wickedness, bad will, deliberate refusal of the known Truth, above all refutation of the revealed Truth and opposition to it, vicious living will really separate forever the souls of the just from those of sinners. Take heart, Syntyche. Such dejection is an assault of hell due to Satan's wrath against you, as you are a prey he has lost forever. There is no Hades. There is My Paradise. But it is not the cause of grief, but of joy. Nothing of the Truth is to be the cause of dejection or doubt, on the contrary it must give you strength for a greater faith and cheerful certainty. Always inform Me of your anxieties. I want the light in you to be as certain and steady as the light of the sun.»

Syntyche, still kneeling, takes His hand and kisses it...

The cry of the cameleer makes the group understand that the camel is about to come back, at a slow pace, without making any noise on the thick grass outside the rear door, which a servant opens at once. And Marjiam comes back, he is happy and his face is flushed after the run. He is a tiny little man hoisted onto the high back of the camel, and he laughs waving his arms, while the camel kneels down and he slides down from the odd saddle, caressing the swarthy cameleer. He then runs towards Jesus shouting: «How lovely! Did the Wise men

come from the East on those animals to worship You? I will go on them to preach You all over the world! The world seems larger when seen from up there and it says: “Come, you who know the Gospel!” Oh! Do You know?... That man also is in need of it... And you, too, merchant, and all your servants... How many people are waiting and die without receiving it... More people than the sand in the river... They are all without You, Jesus! Oh! Make haste and announce it to everybody!» and he clings to Jesus' sides looking up at Him.

And Jesus bends kissing him and promising: «You will see the Kingdom of God evangelized as far as the most remote borders of Rome. Are you happy?»

«I am. And then I will come and say to You: “This, that, and that other Country... they all know You.” I will then know the names of those remote Countries. And what will You say to me?»

«I will say: “Come, little Marjiam. Have a crown for every country in which you have preached Me and then come here beside Me, as on that day at Gerasa, and rest after all your work, because you have been a faithful servant and it is right that you should be happy in My Kingdom.”»

289. From Gerasa to the Fountain of the Cameleer.

29th September 1945.

The caravan leaves Alexander's large courtyard, in perfect order as if it were on a military parade. Jesus is at the rear with all His group. The camels are proceeding, their heavy loads swaying rhythmically and their heads, on their arched necks, seem to be asking at each step: «Why? Why?» in their silent but familiar gait, like the movement of doves, which at each step seem to be saying: «Yes, Yes» to everything they see. The caravan has to cross the town and it does so in the clear morning air. Everyone is all wrapped up because it is cool. The harness-bells of the camels, the cries of the camel-drivers, the screech of a camel regretting the idle stable inform the Gerasenes of Jesus' departure.

The news spreads as fast as lightning and some Gerasenes rush to greet Him offering fruit and other foodstuffs. There is also a man with a sick little boy. «Bless him, that he may recover. Have mercy on us!»

Jesus raises His hand and blesses the child saying: «Go and do not worry. Have faith.»

And the man says «yes» so trustfully, that a woman asks: «Would You cure my husband whose eyes are ulcered?»

«I will, if you can believe.»

«Well, I will go and bring him here. Wait for me, Lord» and she runs away as fast as a swallow.

Wait! Easier said than done! The camels are moving on. Alexander, at the head of the caravan, does not know what is wanted at its rear. The only thing to be done is to send word to the man.

«Run, Marjiam. Go and tell the merchant to stop before going out of the walls» says Jesus. And Marjiam dashes away to fulfill his mission.

The caravan stops and the merchant comes towards Jesus. «What is the matter?»

«Stay here and you will see.»

The woman of Gerasa is soon back with her husband whose eyes are diseased. It is much worse than ulcers! His eyes are two holes full of suppuration. They look dimmed, reddened, half-blind in the centre of the holes, among repulsive dripping tears. As soon as the man lifts the dark bandage dimming the light, tears flow more copiously as the light increases the pain of the diseased eyes.

The man moans: «Have mercy! I suffer so much!»

«You have also sinned very much. Are you not complaining of that? Are you only grieved at the possibility of losing the poor sight of the world? Do you know nothing about God? Are you not afraid of eternal darkness? Why did you sin?»

The man is weeping and he bends without speaking. His wife is also weeping and she moans: «I have forgiven...»

«And I will forgive him as well, if he swears to Me that he will not relapse into his sin.»

«Yes, I do! Forgive me. I now know the consequences of sin. Forgive me. Forgive me as my wife did. You are the Good One.»

«I forgive you. Go to that stream, wash your face in the water and you will be

cured.»

«Cold water will make him worse, Lord» moans the woman.

But the man is not concerned with anything else and he begins to grope until the apostle John pitifully takes him by the hand and leads him by himself at first, until the wife supports him by the other hand. The man goes down as far as the edge of the ice cold water babbling among stones, he bends. He takes some water cupping his hands and washes his face. He does not show any sign of pain. On the contrary, he appears to be relieved.

He then climbs up the bank, with his face still wet, and goes back to Jesus, Who asks him: «Well? Are you cured?»

«No, Lord. Not yet. But You said so and I will be cured.»

«Well, remain in your hope. Goodbye.»

The woman collapses weeping... She is disappointed. Jesus beckons to the merchant that they can go on. And the merchant, who is also disappointed, passes the word on. The camels march off again with their motion resembling a boat which raises and lowers its prow with its cut-water on the waves; they go out of the walls and take to the wide dusty caravan-route south-westwards.

The last couple of the apostolic group, that is, John of Endor and Simon Zealot, have just left the walls a few yards behind, when a shrill cry is heard in the silent air. It seems to spread all over the world, and is repeated in a higher and higher pitch, singing hosannas happily: «I can see! My blessed Jesus! I can see! I believed. I see! Jesus! Jesus! My blessed Jesus!» and the man, whose face is completely cured, with two beautiful eyes: two carbuncles full of light and life, rushes to Jesus' feet and falls almost under the camel of the merchant, who manages to move his mount away from the prostrated man just in time.

The man kisses Jesus' garment repeating: «I believed! I believed and I can see! My blessed Jesus!»

«Stand up and be happy. And, above all, be good. Tell your wife to believe unreservedly. Goodbye.» And Jesus frees Himself from the grasp of the miraculously cured man and resumes His way.

The merchant strokes his beard pensively... At last he asks: «And if he had not persisted in believing, after his disappointment in washing?»

«He would have remained as he was.»

«Why do You exact so much faith to work a miracle?»

«Because faith witnesses the presence of hope and love of God.»

«And why did You want repentance first?»

«Because repentance makes God friendly.»

«Since I have no disease, what should I do to testify that I have faith?»

«You should come to the Truth.»

«And could I come without God's friendship?»

«You could not come without God's goodness. God allows those who look for Him to find Him, even if they are not yet repentant; because man generally repents when he knows God, either consciously or even with a faint consciousness of what his soul wants. Before he is like a blockhead led only by instinct. Have you ever felt the need to believe?»

«Many a time. Well, I was not satisfied with what I had. I felt there was something else. Something stronger than money, than my children, my hope... But I did not bother to try to find out what I was unknowingly seeking.»

«Your soul was seeking God. God's kindness has let you find God. Repentance for your remote idle past will give you the friendship of God.»

«So... in order to have the miracle of seeing the Truth with my soul, I should repent of my past?»

«Certainly. You ought to repent and decide to change your life completely...»

The man begins to stroke his beard once again and he stares so intently that he seems to be studying and counting the hairs on his camel's neck. He unintentionally strikes with his heel the camel which takes the stroke as a spur to quicken its step and it obeys taking the merchant towards the head of the caravan.

Jesus does not keep him back. On the contrary He stops thus allowing the women and apostles to overtake Him, until Simon Zealot and John of Endor reach Him. Jesus joins them.

«Of what are you speaking?» He asks.

«We were speaking of the depression that those must feel who do not believe in anything or have lost the faith they had. Syntyche was really dejected yesterday, although she has come to a perfect faith» replies the Zealot.

«I was saying to Simon that if it is grievous to pass from Good to Evil, it is also disconcerting to pass from Evil to Good. In the former case one is tortured by one's reproaching conscience. In the latter case one is... tormented... Like one who is taken to a completely unknown foreign country... Or it is the dismay of a man, who being a poor unlearned wretch, should find himself at a king's Court, among learned people and gentlemen. It is a pain... I know... Such a long suffering... One cannot believe that it is true, that it can last... that one can deserve it particularly when one's soul is stained... as mine was...»

«And now, John?» asks Jesus.

And John of Endor's worn out sad face brightens with a smile which makes it look less emaciated. He says: «Now, it is no longer so. Only gratitude to the Lord remains, nay, it increases. This the Lord wanted. There is still the memory of the past to keep me humble. But there is certainty. I feel acclimatised, I am no longer a foreigner in this kind world of forgiveness and love which is Yours. And I am serene, happy and in peace.»

«Do you consider your experience a good one?»

«Yes, I do. If I were not sorry for having sinned, because I grieved God through my sin, I would say that I feel that my past was a good thing. It can help me considerably to support willing but mislaid souls, in the first stages of their new belief.»

«Simon, go and tell the boy not to jump about so much. He will be exhausted this evening.»

Simon looks at Jesus, but he understands the truth behind the order. He smiles intelligently and goes away leaving the two all alone.

«Now that we are alone, John, listen to this desire of Mine. For a number of reasons, none of My followers have the breadth of judgement and thought which you have. And your culture is wider than the average learning of Israelites. So I ask you to help Me...»

«Am I to help You? How?»

«On behalf of Syntyche. You are such a clever teacher! Marjiam learns quickly

and well with you. So much so that I am thinking of leaving you together for some months, because I want Marjiam to have a wider knowledge than that of the little world of Israel. And it gives you pleasure to take care of him. And I rejoice seeing you together, you teaching, him learning; you growing young again, him maturing in learning. But you should take care of Syntyche as well, as if she were a lost sister. You said it yourself: one feels lost... Help her to become acclimatised in My atmosphere. Will you do Me this favour?»

«It is a grace for me to do it, my Lord! I did not approach her because I considered myself superfluous. But if You wish so... She reads my rolls. There are some which are sacred, some are only cultural: rolls from Rome and Athens. I see that she goes through them and meditates... But I never intervened in order to assist her. If You want...»

«Yes, I do. I want you to be friends. Like Marjiam and you, she will be staying in Nazareth for some time. It will be lovely: My Mother and you the teachers of two souls opening to God. My Mother: the angelical Teacher of the Science of God; you: the experienced master of human knowledge, which you can now explain with supernatural references. It will be lovely and useful.»

«Yes, my blessed Lord! Too beautiful for poor John!...» and the man smiles at the thought of the oncoming peaceful days with Mary, in Jesus' house... And the road winds along a beautiful country, which is now completely flat after skirting a few little hills just out of Gerasa, in the mild sunshine which is becoming warmer and warmer.

It is a well kept road on which it is comfortable to travel and to take to it again after the midday rest. It is almost evening when I hear Syntyche laugh wholeheartedly for the first time; Marjiam in fact has said something to her which makes all the women laugh. I see the Greek woman bend to caress the boy and kiss him lightly on his forehead. The boy then resumes jumping about as if he did not feel at all tired.

But all the others are tired and are glad for the decision to spend the night at the Fountain of the Cameleer. The merchant says: «I always stop here overnight. The leg from Gerasa to Bozrah, is too long both for men and animals.»

«The merchant is humane» remark the apostles, comparing him to Doras...

The «Fountain of the Cameleer» is only a handful of houses around several wells. It is a kind of oasis, not in the arid desert, because there is no aridity here,

but an oasis in the vast uninhabited fields and orchards which follow one another for miles and which, as the October evening draws on, give the same sad sensation as the sea at twilight. Thus, the sight of houses, the noise of voices, of crying children, the smell of smoking chimneys and the first lights to be lit are as pleasant as one's arrival at home.

While the cameleers stop to water the camels for the first time, the apostles and the women follow Jesus and the merchant who enter... the rather prehistoric inn which will shelter them during the night...

...They are all gathered near a very large fireplace which takes up the whole of the narrow wall of a large smoky room where they have taken their meal, and where the men will sleep and servants are already preparing straw beds on mats. The fire is on because it is a cold damp evening.

«Let us hope that it will not start raining» says Peter with a sigh.

The merchant reassures him: «The bad weather will not begin until this lunation is over. It is always like this in the evening here. But it will be sunshine tomorrow.»

«It's for the women, you know? Not for me. I am a fisherman and I live in water. And I can assure you that I prefer water to mountains and dust.»

Jesus is speaking to the women and His two cousins. John of Endor and the Zealot are also listening to Him. Instead Timoneus and Ermasteus are reading one of John's rolls and the two Israelites are explaining to Ermasteus the Bible passages which are more obscure to him.

Marjiam is listening spellbound, but he looks sleepy. Mary of Alphaeus notices it and says: «That child is tired. Come, dear, let us go to bed. Come, Eliza, come Salome. Old people and children are better in bed. And you had all better go as well. You are tired.»

But besides the elder ones, with the exception of Marcella and Johanna of Chuza, no one moves.

After they have gone, after being blessed, Matthew whispers: «Who would have told these women, only a short while ago, that they were to sleep on straw beds, so far from their homes!»

«I have never slept so well» states Mary of Magdala resolutely. And Martha confirms her statement.

But Peter admits that his companion is right: «Matthew is right. And I wonder why the Master has brought you here, something I fail to understand.»

«Because we are His disciples!»

«Well, if He went where... lions are, would you go?»

«Of course, Simon Peter! What an effort to go for a little walk! And with Him!»

«Well: in actual fact it is a long walk. And for women who are not used to it...»

But the women protest and Peter shrugs his shoulders and becomes silent.

James of Alphaeus, on looking up, sees such a bright smile on Jesus' face, that he asks Him: «Will You tell us, privately, the real purpose of this journey, with the women... and with so little fruit, as compared to its fatigue?»

«Could you expect to see now the fruit of the seed buried in the fields which we have crossed?»

«I could not. I will see it in springtime.»

«I also say to you: “You will see it in due time.”»

The apostles do not reply.

The silvery voice of Mary is heard: «Son, we were talking today of what You said at Ramoth. And each of us had different impressions and reflections. Would You tell us Your thought? I said that it was better to call You at once. But You were speaking to John of Endor.»

«In actual fact I raised the question. Because I am a poor heathen and I do not have the splendid light of your faith. You must sympathise with me.»

«I would like to have your soul, my dear sister!» says the Magdalene impulsively. And exuberant as she is, she embraces Syntyche clasping her with one arm. Her wonderful beauty seems to give light by itself to the miserable dwelling and to decorate it with the wealth of her sumptuous house. The Greek woman, who is entirely different and yet has such a singular personality while embraced by the Magdalene, adds a meditative note to the cry of love which seems to be always bursting forth from passionate Mary, meanwhile the Blessed Virgin, sitting with Her gentle face raised towards Her Son, Her hands clasped as if She were praying, Her most pure profile outstanding against the black wall, is the perpetual Adorer.

Susanna is dozing in the shadow of a comer, while Martha, who is active notwithstanding her weariness and the pressure of the others, takes advantage of the light of the fireplace to fasten some buckles on Marjiam's garment.

Jesus says to Syntyche: «But it was not a grievous thought. I heard you laugh.»

«Yes, because of the boy, who solved the question easily, saying: “I do not want to come back unless Jesus does. But if you want to know everything, go to the next world, then come back and tell us whether you remember.”»

They all laugh again and say that Syntyche was asking Mary for a clarification on the explanation, which she had not understood properly, of the remembrance which souls have and which explains a certain possibility for heathens to have vague recollections of the Truth.

«I was saying: “Does that perhaps confirm the theory of reincarnation in which many heathens believe?” and Your Mother was telling me that what You say is something entirely different. Will You explain also this to me, my Lord?»

«Listen. You must not believe that the fact that souls have spontaneous recollections of Truth proves that we live several lives. By now you have already learned enough to be aware of how man was created, how he sinned and was punished. You have also been told that God incorporated a single soul in each man. *That soul is created from time to time and is never again used for subsequent incarnations.* This certainty would seem to cancel My statement concerning the recollections of souls. It should cancel it with regard to any other being with the exception of man, who is gifted with a soul made by God.

Animals cannot remember anything, as they are born once only. But man can remember, although he is born once only. He remembers with his better part: his soul. Where do souls come from? The soul of each man? From God. Who is God? The most intelligent, powerful, perfect Spirit. This wonderful thing which is a soul, a thing created by God to give man His image and likeness as an unquestionable sign of His Most Holy Paternity, shows signs of the qualities characteristic of Him Who creates it. It is therefore *intelligent, spiritual, free, immortal*, like the Father Who created it. It is perfect when it originates from the divine thought and in the instant of its creation it is identical, for a thousandth of instant, with the soul of the first man: a perfection which understands the Truth through free gift. A thousandth of an instant. Then, once it is formed, it is stained by original sin. To make it clearer for you I will say that it is as if God were pregnant with the soul which He creates and the creature, in being born,

were wounded by an indelible mark. Do you understand Me?»

«Yes, I do. *While it is thought it is perfect. The creating thought lasts a thousandth of an instant. The thought then becomes actual fact and the fact is subject to the law brought about by Sin.*»

«Your reply is correct. A soul becomes thus incarnate in a human body, bringing with it the memory of the Creator, that is of the Truth, as a secret gem in the mystery of its spiritual being. A baby is born. It may become good, very good or wicked. It may become anything because it is endowed with free will. The angelical ministry throws light on its “memories” and the tempter darkness. If man craves after light and thus for a greater and greater virtue, making his soul the master of his being, the faculty of remembering increases in the soul, as if virtue made the wall interposed between soul and God thinner and thinner. That is why virtuous people in every country perceive the Truth, not in a perfect way, as they are dulled by contrasting doctrines or by lethal ignorance, but in a sufficient manner to give pages of moral perfection to the peoples to whom they belong. Have you understood? Are you convinced?»

«Yes. In conclusion, the religion of virtue practised heroically predisposes the soul to the true Religion and to the knowledge of God.»

«Exactly. And now go and rest and may you be blessed. And You, too, Mother, and you sisters and disciples. May you rest in the peace of God.»

290. Going to Bozrah.

30th September 1945.

The merchant was right. October could not have granted the pilgrims a lovelier day. After the sun had dispelled the haze which veiled the country, as if nature had laid a veil over the sleeping plants at night, the country appears in its solemn stretch of cultivated fields warmed by the sun. The fog seems to have gathered together on remote mountain tops decorating them with a transparent foam, thus softening them even more against the serene sky.

«What are those? Mountains we have to climb?» asks Peter anxiously.

«No. They are the Hauran mountains. We shall be on the plain, on this side of the mountains. Before evening we shall be at Bozrah in Hauran. A beautiful good town. Much trade» says the merchant encouraging Peter and praising the town, considering, as usual, commercial prosperity as the basis of the beauty of a place.

Jesus is all alone, in the rear, as He is wont to do at times when He so wishes.

Marjiam turns round several times looking at Him. When he can resist no longer, he leaves Peter and James of Zebedee, he sits on the edge of the road, on a stone which must be a Roman military landmark, and waits. When Jesus is at his level, the boy stands up and without speaking he goes beside Jesus, remaining a little behind Him so as not to annoy Him, and, he watches Him...

And he continues watching until Jesus comes out of His meditation and turns round on hearing the light footstep behind Him and He smiles stretching His hand out to the boy and saying: «Oh! Marjiam! What are you doing here all alone?»

«I was looking at You. I have been looking at You for days. Everybody has eyes but not everybody sees the same things. I have noticed that now and again You want to remain all alone... On the first days I thought You were hurt by something. Then I noticed that You do it always at the same time and that Mother, Who always comforts You when You are sad, does not say anything to You when Your countenance is like that. On the contrary, if She happens to be speaking, She becomes quiet and concentrates on meditation. I notice things, You know? Because I always look at You and Her, in order to do what You do. I asked the apostles what You do, because You certainly do something. They said to me: “He prays.” And I asked them: “What does He say?.” No one replied, because they do not know. They have been with You for years, and they do not know. Today I followed You every time I noticed that countenance and I watched You while You were praying. But Your countenance is not always the same. This morning, at dawn, You looked like a bright angel. You looked at things with such bright eyes that I think they dispelled darkness more than the sun did. And You looked at things and people like that. And then You looked at the sky and Your face was the same as when You offer the bread at table. Later, when we were crossing that little village, You remained alone, in the rear, and You seemed to me a father, as You were so anxious to say kind words to the poor people of the village, while passing by. You said to one: “Endure your suffering with patience, because I will soon relieve you and others like you.” He

was the slave of that bad man who set his dogs on us. Then, while the food was being prepared, You looked at us with eyes full of kind love. You looked like a mother... But Your countenance was now sorrowful... What do You think, Jesus, when You are always like that?... But also in the evening, at times, if I am not asleep, I see that You are very serious. Will You tell me how You pray, why You pray?»

«Of course, I will tell you. So that you can pray with Me. The day is given to us by God. The whole day: the bright one and the dark one: day and night. It is a gift to live and have light. Our way of living is a means of sanctification. Is that right? So we must sanctify the moments of the whole day, to persevere in holiness and have the Most High and His bounty present in our hearts, and at the same time, keep the Demon away. Watch the little birds. They sing at sunrise. They bless the light. We must bless the light as well, because it is a gift of God, and we must bless God Who grants it to us and Who is the Light. We must crave for God as from daybreak to put a seal, a note of light on the whole oncoming day, that it may be entirely bright and holy. And we must join the whole creation in praising the Creator. Then, as the hours go by, and going by they make us aware of how much sorrow and ignorance there is in the world, we must pray again that sorrow may be relieved and ignorance may vanish and God may be known, loved and prayed to by all men, who, if they knew God, would be comforted in their sufferings. And at the sixth hour we must pray out of love for our family, to enjoy the gift of being united to those who love us. That is also a gift of God. And we must pray that our eating, instead of being useful, may not become an occasion of sin. And at sunset we pray remembering that death is the inevitable end waiting for all of us. And we must pray that our end, be it today or later, may take place with our souls in grace. And when the lights are lit, we must pray to thank for the day which is over and to ask for protection and forgiveness, so that we may go to sleep without any fear of a sudden judgement or assaults of the demon. And, finally, we must pray at night – but this applies only to adults – to make amends for the sins of the night, to keep Satan away from weak people, and that culprits may ponder, repent and make good resolutions which will become facts at sunrise. That is how and why a just person prays during the whole day.»

«But You have not told me why You are so absorbed, so grave and imposing at the ninth hour...

«Because... I say: “Through the Sacrifice of this hour, let Your Kingdom come

to the world and may all those who believe in Your Word be redeemed.” Say the same yourself...

«What sacrifice is it? You said that incense is offered in the morning and evening, and the victims at the same hour, every day, on the altar of the Temple. And that the victims for vows and expiation are offered at any hour. There is no indication of a special rite for the ninth hour.»

Jesus stops and takes the boy with both hands, and lifts him holding him in front of Himself, and as if He were saying a psalm, with His face raised, He says: «“And between the sixth and ninth hour, He Who has come as Saviour and Redeemer, He of Whom the prophets speak, will consume His Sacrifice after eating the bitter bread of betrayal and after giving the sweet Bread of Life, after crushing Himself like grapes in a vat and quenching with His whole being the thirst of men and plants, and making for Himself a Royal purple with His own blood, and putting on a crown and seizing the sceptre, and taking His throne on the high place, so that Zion and Israel and the world might see it. Lifted up in the purple garment of His numberless wounds, in the dark to give Light, in death to give Life, He will die at the ninth hour and the world will be redeemed.”»

Marjiam is frightened and pale and looks at Him with dismayed eyes and trembling lips on the point of bursting into tears. With faltering voice he says: «But You are the Saviour! So will You be dying at that hour?» Tears begin to stream down his cheeks and his little mouth sips them, while he awaits a denial.

But Jesus says: «I will, My little disciple. For you, too.» And as the child bursts into convulsive sobs, He presses him to His heart and says: «Are you sorry that I die?»

«Oh! My only joy! I do not want that! I... Let me die in Your place...»

«You are to preach Me all over the world. That is settled. But listen. I will die happily because I know that you love Me. Then I will rise from the dead. Do you remember Jonah? He was more handsome when he came out of the belly of the whale well rested and strong. So will I, and I will come to you at once and I will say to you: “Little Marjiam, your tears quenched My thirst. Your love kept Me company in the Sepulchre. I have now come to say to you: 'Be My priest'” and I will kiss you with the scent of Paradise still on Me.»

«But where will I be? Will I not be with Peter or Mother?»

«I will save you from the evil waves of those days. I will save the most weak

and innocent ones. Except one... Marjiam, little apostle, will you help me to pray for that hour?»

«Oh! Yes, I will, Lord! And the others?»

«That is a secret between you and Me. A great secret. Because God loves to be revealed to the little ones... Do not weep any more. Smile at the thought that afterwards I will suffer no more and I will only remember all the love of men, and yours first. Come. Look how far the others are. Let us run and join them» and He puts him down and holding him by the hand they start running until they reach the group.

«Master, what have You done?»

«I was explaining the hours of the day to Marjiam.»

«And has the boy wept? He must have been naughty, and You are excusing him out of kindness» says Peter.

«No, Simon. He watched Me praying. You have not done that. He asked Me why. I told him. The boy was moved by My words. Now leave him alone. Go to My Mother, Marjiam. And you all, listen to Me. The lesson will do no harm to you either.»

And Jesus explains once again the usefulness of prayer at the main hours of the day, leaving out the explanation of the ninth hour and concluding: «Union to God is to have Him present every moment to praise and invoke Him. Do so and you will make progress in the life of the spirit.»

Bozrah is now close at hand. Stretched out on the plain it looks a large beautiful town with walls and towers. The evening which is drawing on, tones down the shades of houses and country into a greyish languid lilac, in which all contours become vague, while grunting pigs and bleating sheep in the enclosures outside the walls, break the silence of the country. The silence comes to an end as soon as the caravan goes through the gate entering a labyrinth of narrow streets which disappoint those who from the outside thought the town was beautiful. Voices, smells and... stench stagnate in the twisted lanes and accompany the pilgrims as far as a square, the market square, where the inn is.

They thus arrive at Bozrah.

291. At Bozrah.

1st October 1945.

Bozrah looks very dull in the morning mist, both because of the season and because the town is closed in its narrow streets. It looks dull and dirty. The apostles, who have come back from their shopping at the market, are talking about it. Hotel practice in those days and in such places is so utterly antiquated, that one has to see to one's victuals. Innkeepers obviously do not want to lose any money. So they only cook what customers bring them, and let us hope that they do not steal any of that. Or at most they buy food for customers or sell them what they have in stock, working as butchers, if necessary, preparing poor lambs to be roasted.

Peter does not like buying from the innkeeper and is now squabbling with him. The man, with a rather roguish face, goes to the point of insulting the apostle, calling him «Galilean», while Peter answers back, pointing to a little pig, which the host has just slaughtered for some guests: «I am a Galilean, and you are a pig, you pagan. I would not stay in your stinking inn for one hour, if it depended on me. You thief and... (and he adds here a very clear epithet... which I leave in my pen).» I realise that between the people of Bozrah and the Galileans there is one of the many regional or religious incompatibilities, of which Israel, or rather Palestine was full.

The host shouts louder: «If you were not with the Nazarene, and I were not better than your filthy Pharisees who hate Him without any good reason, I would wash your face with the blood of the pig, so you would have to get out of here and rush to purify yourself. But I respect Him, Whose power is known. And I tell you, that notwithstanding all your fuss, you are sinners. We are better than you are. We do not lay snares neither do we betray. You, faugh! You are a lot of unfair traitors and rascals and you do not even respect the few holy people among you.»

«Who are you calling traitors? Us? Ah! In God's truth I...» Peter is furious and is about to break upon the man, when his brother and James hold him back, and Simon Zealot intervenes with Matthew.

But Peter's wrath is abated not so much by their intervention as by the voice of

Jesus Who appears at one of the doors and says: «You now, Simon, will be quiet. And you, too, man.»

«Lord, this man was the first to insinuate and threaten.»

«Nazarene, I was offended first.»

I, he. He and I. The two culprits cast blame on each other.

Jesus comes forward seriously and calmly. «You are both wrong. And you, Simon, more than he is. Because you know the doctrine of love, of forgiveness, of meekness, of patience and brotherhood. In order not to be ill-treated as a Galilean, you must make yourself respected as a saint. And you, man, bless the Lord if you feel that you are better than others and endeavour to be worthy of becoming better and better. And above all, do not foul your soul with false charges. My disciples neither betray nor lay snares.»

«Are You sure, Nazarene? Well, then, why did those four come and ask me whether You had come, with whom You were and so many more questions?»

«What? Who are they? Where are they?» The apostles gather round him, forgetting that they are drawing close to a person still wet with the blood of a pig, which struck them with horror shortly before and kept them away.

«Go and mind your own business. You may stay, Misace.»

The apostles go into the room from which Jesus came out, and only Jesus and the innkeeper are left in the yard, one facing the other. The merchant is a few steps from Jesus and is watching the scene spellbound.

«Tell Me the truth, man. And forgive if blood made one of My disciples furious. Who are those four and what did they say?»

«I do not know exactly who they are. They are certainly scribes and Pharisees from the other side. I do not know who brought them here. I have never seen them. But they are well informed of You. They know from where You have come, where You are going, with whom You are. But they wanted confirmation from me. No. I may be a rascal. But I know my business. I know nobody and I see nothing. I know nothing. With regard to others, of course. As far as I am concerned, I know everything. But why should I tell others, particularly those hypocrites, what I know? Am I a rascal? Yes. If necessary I side also with robbers. In any case, You know... But I could not steal or try to steal Your freedom, honour and life. And those – I am no longer Phara of Ptolemy if what I

say is not true and those are lying in wait for You, to do You harm. And who sent them? Perhaps someone from Perea or the Decapolis? Or someone from Trachonitis or Gaulanitis or Hauran? No. We either do not know You, or if we have heard of You, we respect You as a just man, if we do not believe in You as a saint. So, who sent them? Someone on Your side and perhaps one of Your friends, because they know too many things...»

«It is easy to be informed of my caravan...» says Misace.

«No, merchant. Not of you, but of the others who are with Jesus. I do not know and I do not want to know. I do not see and I do not want to see. But I say to You: if You are guilty, make amends, if You know that You have been betrayed, take the necessary action.»

«I am neither guilty, man, nor betrayed. The only trouble is that Israel does not understand Me. But how do you know about Me?»

«Through a boy. A mischievous boy who had a bad reputation at Bozrah and Arbela. Here, because he came here to commit his sins, there because he dishonoured his family. Then he became converted and more honest than a just man. And he passed by with Your disciples, a disciple himself, and is waiting for You at Arbela, to honour You with his father and mother. And he tells everybody that You changed his heart through his mother's prayers. If this region ever becomes a holy one, Philip of James will have the merit of having sanctified it. And if there is anyone who believes in You in Bozrah, it is due to him.»

«Where are the scribes now, who came here?»

«I don't know. They went away because I told them that I had no rooms for them. I had them, but I did not want to give hospitality to snakes and thus have them close to the dove. They are certainly in this area. Be careful.»

«Thank you, man, What is your name?»

«Phara. I did my duty. Remember me.»

«Yes. And you must remember God. And forgive My Simon. The great love he has for Me at times blinds him.»

«No harm. I offended him as well... But it hurts to be insulted. You do not insult...»

Jesus sighs... He then says: «Will you help the Nazarene?»

«If I can...»

«I would be glad to speak from this yard...»

«And I will let You speak. When?»

«Between the sixth and ninth hour.»

«Go wherever You want and do not worry. Bozrah will know that You are going to speak. I will see to it.»

«May God reward you for it» and Jesus smiles at him, a smile which is already a reward. He then goes to the room where He was before.

Alexander Misace says: «Master, will You smile at me as well, like that?... I am also going to tell the citizens to come and listen to the Bounty Which is speaking. I know many. Goodbye.»

«May God reward you, too» and Jesus smiles at him.

He enters the room. The women are around Mary, Whose face is sorrowful and She gets up at once and goes towards Her Son. She does not speak. Her whole attitude is uncertainty. Jesus smiles at Her and He replies to Her saying to everybody: «Be free by the sixth hour. I will speak here to many people. In the meantime go, everybody, with the exception of Simon Peter, John and Ermasteus. Go and announce Me and give plentiful alms.»

The apostles go away.

Peter slowly approaches Jesus Who is near the women and asks: «Why did You not send me as well?»

«When one is too impulsive, one stays at home. Simon, Simon! When will you learn to be charitable to your neighbour? For the time being it is a burning flame, but only for Me, it is a straight and stiff blade, but only for Me. Be mild, Simon of Jonah.»

«You are right, Master. Your Mother has already reproached me, as She knows how to, but without hurting. But it penetrated right into me. But... reproach me as well, but do not look at me so sadly.»

«Be good... Syntyche, I would like to speak to you privately. Come up to the terrace. Will you come, as well, Mother...»

And on the rustic terrace, which covers one wing of the building, in the sunshine which warms the air, walking slowly between Mary and the Greek woman, Jesus says: «Tornorrow we will part for a little while. When near Arbela, you women with John of Endor, will go towards the Sea of Galilee and will continue together as far as Nazareth. But as I do not want to send you by yourselves with an almost disabled man, I will get My brothers and Simon Peter to accompany you. I can foresee that there will be some reluctance to separate. But obedience is the virtue of the just. When you go through the country over which Chuza watches in Herod's name, Johanna can find some more people to escort you on the rest of the way. You will then send back Alphaeus' sons and Simon Peter. But the reason why I asked you to come up here is as follows. I want to tell you, Syntyche, that I have decided for you to stay for some time in My Mother's house. She already knows. John of Endor and Marjiam will be staying with you. Stay there willingly, perfecting yourself more and more in Wisdom. I want you to take great care of poor John. I am not saying this to My Mother because She does not need any advice. You can understand John and sympathise with him, and he can do you much good because he is an experienced master. I will come later. Oh! Quite soon! And we will often meet. I hope to find you wiser and wiser in the Truth. I bless you particularly, Syntyche. This is My farewell from you, for this time. You will find love and hatred in Nazareth as anywhere else. But in My house you will find peace. Always.»

«Nazareth will ignore me and I will ignore Nazareth. I will live nourishing myself with the Truth and the world will be nothing to me, Lord.»

«Very well. You may go, Syntyche. And do not mention it to anybody, for the time being. Mother, You know... I trust these dearest pearls of Mine to You. While we are in peace, among ourselves, Mother, let Your Jesus refresh Himself in Your caresses...»

«How much hatred, Son!»

«How much love!»

«How much bitterness, My dear Jesus!»

«How much sweetness!»

«How much incomprehension, My Son!»

«How much comprehension, Mother!»

«Oh! My darling, My Dear Son!»

«Mother! Joy of God and Mine! Mother!»

They kiss each other and remain together, on the stone bench against the low terrace wall: Jesus embracing His Mother, a loving protector, Mary reclining Her head on Her Son's shoulder, Her hands in His: happy... The world is so distant... buried in the waves of love and faithfulness...

292. The Sermon and Miracles at Bozrah.

2nd October 1945.

...And the world is so close with its waves of hatred, betrayal, sorrow, need, curiosity. And the waves come, like those of the sea in a harbour, to die here, in the yard of the inn at Bozrah, which the respectful host, whose heart is better than his face makes one suppose, has cleaned of excrement and dirt. There is a large crowd of people, both local and strangers, but of the same region. And there are people whose conversation gives me to understand that they come from very far, from the lake area or beyond the lake. I catch the names of villages, and parts of sorrowful stories in the conversation of the people awaiting Jesus. Gadara, Hippo, Gerghesa, Gamala, Aphek, Nain, Endor, Jezreel, Magdala and Korazim, are mentioned by many people together with the stories of the reasons why they have come from so far.

«When I heard that He had come through Trans-Jordan, I was discouraged. But some disciples came when I was about to go back to Jezreel and they said to us, who were waiting at Capernaum: “He is certainly beyond Gerasa by now. Waste no time, go to Bozrah or Arbela” and I came with these people...»

«I instead, saw some Pharisees pass through Gadara. They were asking where was Jesus of Nazareth, Whom they knew to be in the area. My wife is ill. I joined them. Then yesterday at Arbela I heard that He was coming to Bozrah first, so I came here.»

«I have come from Gadara for this boy. He was gored by a furious cow. He has been left in that state...» and he shows his son who is utterly shrivelled and unable to move his arms.

«I could not bring mine. I come from Megiddo. What do you think? Will He cure him from here also?» moans a woman whose face is red with weeping.

«No, the sick person must be present.»

«No, It is enough to have faith.»

«No. Unless He imposes His hands, one is not cured. His disciples also do that.»

«You have come a long way for nothing, woman.»

The woman begins to weep saying: «Poor me! I left him when he was almost dying, hoping... He will not cure him, and I will not comfort him in his death...»

Another woman consoles her: «Don't believe that, woman. I have come to thank Him because He worked a great miracle for me, without leaving the mountain on which He was speaking.»

«What was the matter with your son?»

«It was not my son. It was my husband who had become mad...» and the two women continue speaking in low voices.

«It is true. Also a mother at Arbela had her son redeemed without the Master seeing him» says a man from Arbela and he goes on speaking to some people near him...

«Make way, for pity's sake! Make way!» shout some bearers of a litter which is completely covered.

The crowds open out and the litter goes by with its sorrowful load, and stops at the end of the yard, almost behind a rick of straw. Is it a man or a woman lying on the litter? Who knows!

Two Pharisees come in: they are vainglorious and well preserved and more proud than ever. They assault the poor host as if they were mad, shouting: «You cursed liar! Why did you tell us that He was not here? Are you His accomplice? How dare you despise us, the holy ones in Israel, to favour... Whom, after all? How do you know who He is? What is He to you?»

«What is He? What you are not. But I did not lie. He came a few hours after you had left. He did not hide Himself, neither do I hide Him. But as I am the boss here, I tell you at once: “Get out of my house!” You do not insult the Nazarene here. Do you understand? And if you do not understand my words, I can speak to you in a more factual way, you jackals!»

The robust innkeeper seems so decided to come to blows that the two Pharisees

change tone and become like creeping pups menaced by lash. «But we are looking for Him to revere Him! What are you thinking of? The thought that we might not see Him through your fault made us furious. We know Who He is. The holy and blessed Messiah, to Whom we are not worthy to raise our eyes. We are dust, He is the glory of Israel. Take us to Him. Our souls are yearning to hear His words.»

The host imitates their voices and gestures in a wonderful way: «Oh! Of course! And how could I ever suspect it was not so, since I am so well aware of the fame of Pharisees' justice?! Of course! You have come to worship Him! You are yearning for that! I will go and tell Him! I am going... No, by Satan! You shall not follow me! Neither will you, or I will strike you so much, you poisonous mummies, that I will make one knock into the other. Stay here. You stay here, where I am putting you. And you here. And I am sorry I cannot knock you into the ground up to your necks and use you as pegs to tie the pigs to be slaughtered» and he passes from words to deeds by seizing the leaner Pharisee by his armpits, lifting him up and dropping him so violently on the ground, that if it were not very hard the poor fellow would have sunk into it up to his ankles. But the ground is hard and the Pharisee remains standing like a puppet, after being tossed about so much. Then the host gets hold of the other man, and although he is rather fat, the innkeeper raises and drops him with the same fury, and as the Pharisee reacts wriggling, he knocks him down and makes him sit: a bundle of flesh and cloth... He then goes away uttering a nasty word which is lost among the moans of the two and the laughter of many more.

He goes through a corridor into a small yard, he climbs a little staircase, reaches a porched gallery and enters a large room in which Jesus and His group are about to finish their meal with the merchant.

«Two of the four Pharisees have come. You had better see what You must do. For the time being I have seen to them. They wanted to come with me. But I did not want them. They are now down in the yard with many sick people and many others.»

«I will come at once. Thank you, Phara, You may go.»

They all get up. Jesus orders His disciples and the women to stay where they are, with the exception of His Mother, Mary Clopas, Susanna and Salome. But seeing the sad countenance of those who have been excluded, He says: «Go up to the terrace. You will hear Me just the same.»

He goes out with the apostles and the four women. He goes back the same way as the host came and enters the large yard. The crowds crane their necks to see, and those who are sly climb up on to straw stacks, on carts standing on one side, or on the edge of reservoirs...

The two Pharisees go and meet Him ceremoniously. Jesus greets them with His usual salutation as if they were His most faithful friends. But He does not stop to reply to their unctuous questions: «Are you so few? And without disciples? So they have left You?»

Jesus continuing to walk replies gravely: «No one left Me. You have come from Arbela where you met those who precede Me, and in Judaea you met Judas of Simon, Thomas, Nathanael and Philip.»

The stout Pharisee no longer dare follow Him and he stops all of a sudden blushing. The other, who is more barefaced, insists: «That is true. But as we knew that You were with faithful disciples and with some women, we were surprised at seeing You with so few people. We wanted to see Your new conquests and congratulate You» and he gives a false smile.

«My new conquests? There they are!» and Jesus makes a wide semicircular gesture, pointing at the crowds, which are mainly from the region beyond the Jordan, that is from this region where Bozrah is. And without giving the Pharisee time to retort, He begins to speak.

«Those who previously did not inquire about Me, have been looking for Me. And those who previously did not look for Me have found Me. And I said: “Here I am” to a nation which did not invoke My Name. Glory be to the Lord Who speaks the truth through the lips of the prophets! Looking at this crowd which has gathered round Me I really rejoice in the Lord because I see that the promises, which the Eternal Father made to Me when He sent Me to the world, have been fulfilled. Those promises which I Myself, with the Father and the Paraclete, put in the thoughts, on the lips and in the hearts of the prophets, the promises of which I was aware before becoming Flesh and which encouraged Me to be made flesh. And they encourage Me. Yes, they encourage Me against hatred, malice, mistrust and falsehood. Those who previously did not inquire about Me, have been looking for Me. And those who did not look for Me, have found Me. How come, if I was instead rejected by those to whom I had stretched out My hands saying: “Here I am”? And yet they knew Me, whereas these people here did not know Me. So?

Here is the key to the mystery. It is not a fault to ignore, but it is a fault to deny. And too many of those who know Me and to whom I stretched My hands, have denied Me as if I were illegitimate or a thief, a corrupting demon, because their pride has extinguished their faith and they have gone astray along bad, twisted sinful ways, leaving the way which My voice points out to them. Sin is in the heart, on the table, in the beds, in the hearts, in the minds of this people which rejects Me and which, seeing its own filth reflected everywhere, sees it on Me also, and its bitterness piles it up more and more, and it says to Me: "Go away, because You are unclean."

So what will He say, Who is coming with His robe dyed red, handsome in His garment, and is walking in the power of His strength? Will He accomplish already what Isaiah says, and will He not be quiet, but will He pour on their laps what they deserve? No, He will not. First He has to tread the winepress alone, abandoned by everybody, to make the wine of Redemption. The wine that exhilarates the just and makes them blessed, the wine that exhilarates the guilty of the great sin, to crush their sacrilegious power into crumbs. Yes, My wine, which is maturing hour by hour in the sun of Eternal Love, will be the ruin and salvation of many, as it is stated in a prophecy not yet written, but deposited in the unsplit rock from which the Vine giving the Wine of eternal Life sprang up.

Do you understand? No, you doctors of Israel do not understand. But it does not matter whether you understand. The darkness of which Isaiah speaks is descending upon you: "They have eyes and do not see. They have ears and do not hear." You shield the Light with your hatred, so that one can say that the Light was repelled by darkness and the world refused to know it.

But exult, you who were in the dark and believed in the Light which was announced to you, and you desired it, sought it and found it. Exult, o faithful people who have come to Salvation crossing mountains, valleys and lakes without considering the burden of the long journey. The same applies to the other spiritual journey which will take you, o people of Bozrah, from the darkness of ignorance to the light of Wisdom.

Exult, o people of Hauran! Exult in the joy of knowledge. Truly it refers also to you and to your neighbouring peoples, when the Prophet sings that your camels and dromedaries will crowd the streets of Naphtali and Zebulun to worship the true God, and to be His servants in the holy mild law, which does not impose anything in order to give divine paternity and eternal happiness but compliance with the ten commandments of the Lord: to love the true God with one's whole

being, to love one's neighbour as oneself, to keep the Sabbath without desecrating it, to honour one's parents, not to kill, not to steal, not to commit adultery, not to bear false witness, not to covet the wife or property of other people. Oh! you are blessed. If coming from farther away you will go beyond those who belonged to the house of the Lord and went out of it, urged by the ten commandments of Satan: dislike of God, love of oneself, corruption of cult, harshness towards parents, murderous desire, attempt to steal other people's holiness, fornication with Satan, false witness, envy of the nature and mission of the Word, and the horrible sin which ferments and matures in the depth of hearts, of too many hearts.

Exult, you who are thirsty! Exult, you who are hungry! Exult, you who are afflicted! Were you rejected? Were you proscribed? Were you despised? Were you strangers? Come! Exult! It is no longer so. I give you homes, wealth, paternity and fatherland. I give you Heaven. Follow Me, because I am the Saviour! Follow Me, because I am the Redeemer! Follow Me, because I am the Life! Follow Me, because I am He to Whom the Father refuses no grace! Exult in My love! Exult! And that you may realise that I love you, you who have sought Me in your sorrows, you who have believed in Me even before knowing Me, that this may be a day of true exultation, I pray thus: "Father, Holy Father! On all the wounds, diseases, sores of bodies, on the grief, tortures, remorse of hearts, on all the faithful who are springing up, on those who are vacillating, on those who are strengthening, let health, grace, peace descend! Peace in My Name! Grace in Your Name! Health through Our reciprocal love! Bless them, o Most Holy Father! Gather and form one fold with these lost children of Yours and Mine! Let them be where I will be, one with You, Holy Father, with You, with Me and with the Most Divine Spirit."»

Jesus, with His arms stretched out crosswise, His palms upwards towards the sky, His face raised, His voice blaring like a silver tuba, is overwhelming in His speech... He remains thus, silent, for some moments. Then His sapphire eyes stop looking at the sky to look at the large yard crowded with people who are sighing deeply moved or are quivering with hope; He joins His hands moving them forward and with a smile which transfigures Him, He utters a final cry: «Exult, you who believe and hope! People of sufferers, rise and love the Lord your God!»

The healing of the diseased is simultaneous and general. Trilling voices and roaring shouts praise the Saviour. A woman squeezes through the crowd, from

the far end of the yard, dragging the sheet that had covered her and collapses at the feet of the Lord. This time the terrified crowds utter a different shout:

«Mary, the leprous wife of Joachim!» and they run in all directions.

«Be not afraid! She is cured. Contact with her can do you no harm» says Jesus reassuring them. And He says to the prostrated female: «Stand up, woman. You have been rewarded for your great hope and you are forgiven for neglecting prudence towards your brothers. Go back home after the salutary ablutions.»

The woman, who is young and quite beautiful, stands up weeping. Jesus shows her to the crowds who have come back and admire the miracle shouting out of astonishment.

«Her husband, who adored her, had built a shelter for her at the end of his fields and went to its border every evening and gave her some food weeping...»

«She became infected through her pity, taking care of a beggar who did not say that he was a leper.»

«But how did Mary, the good woman, come here?»

«On that litter. How did we not notice Joachim's two servants?»

«They ran the risk of being stoned for that.»

«Their mistress! They love her, she is so kind that they love her more than themselves...»

Jesus makes a gesture and they all become silent: «You can see that love and goodness bring miracles and joy. So, be good. Go, woman. No one will do you any harm. Peace be with you and with your household.»

The woman, followed by the servants who have burnt the litter in the middle of the yard, goes out and many people follow her.

Jesus dismisses the crowd after listening to some people and He retires to the house followed by those who were with Him.

«What words, Master!»

«How transfigured You were!»

«What a voice!»

«And what miracles!»

«Did you see the Pharisees flee?»

«They went away like two creeping lizards immediately after the first words.»

«The people of Bozrah and of all the villages here have a wonderful recollection of You...»

«Mother, what do You say?»

«I bless You, Son, on their behalf and Mine.»

«Well, Your blessing will follow Me until we meet again.»

«Why do You say that, Lord? Are the women leaving us?»

«Yes, Simon, Tomorrow at daybreak Alexander is leaving for Aera. We will go with him as far as the road to Arbela and we will then leave him. And with regret, believe Me, Alexander, because you have been a kind guide for the Pilgrim. I will always remember you, Alexander.»

The old man is moved. He is standing with his arms folded on his chest, in the deep eastern salutation, bending a little in front of Jesus. But when he hears His words, he says: «Above all, remember me when You are in Your Kingdom.»

«Do you wish that, Misace?»

«Yes, my Lord.»

«I also wish something of you.»

«Which, Lord? If I can I will give it to You, even if it were the most precious thing I possess.»

«It is the most precious. I want your soul. Come to Me. I told you, at the beginning of our journey, that I hoped to give you a gift at the end of it. My gift is Faith. Do you believe in Me, Misace?»

«I do believe, Lord.»

«Then sanctify your soul so that faith may not be for you not only an inert but also a harmful gift.»

«My soul is old. But I will endeavour to make it new. Lord, I am an old sinner. Absolve me and bless me, because as from this moment I am beginning a new life. I will take Your blessing with me as the best escort in my journey towards Your Kingdom... Shall we ever meet again, Lord?»

«Not on this earth. But you will hear of Me and you will believe even more because I will not leave you without evangelization. Goodbye, Misace. We shall

not have much time tomorrow to say goodbye to each other. Let us do so now, before taking our food together for the last time.» He embraces and kisses him.

The apostles and disciples also do so. The women greet him all together.

But Misace kneels down almost in front of Mary saying: «May Your light of a pure morning star shine in my mind until my death.»

«Until Life, Alexander. Love My Son and you will love Me, and I will love you.»

Simon Peter asks: «But shall we be going from Arbela to Aera? I am afraid we may be caught in bad weather. There is so much fog... We have had it for three days at dawn and sunset...»

«That is because we have been coming down here. Do you not think that we have come down a good deal? It is so. Tomorrow you will be climbing towards the mountains of the Decapolis and there will be no more fog there» explains Misace.

«Come down? When? It was a flat road...»

«Yes, but in continuous descent. Oh! so slowly that one does not notice it. But in many miles...»

«How long shall we be staying at Arbela?»

«You, James and Judas, not even one hour» replies Jesus resolutely.

«James and Judas... I... not even one hour? And where am I going if I am not staying with you all?»

«You are going away. As far as the land in the guardianship of Chuza. You will take My Mother and the women there, with the others. They will then proceed by themselves with Johanna's servants and you will come back and join Me at Aera.»

«Oh! Lord! You are angry with me and You are punishing me... How much You grieve me, Lord!»

«Simon, he feels that he is punished who knows that he is guilty. Being guilty must grieve you, not the punishment in itself. But I do not think that it is a punishment to accompany My Mother and the women disciples on their way back home.»

«But would it not be better if You came with us? Never mind Aera and these places and come with us.»

«I promised to go and I will go.»

«Then I will come, too.»

«You will obey without complaining, as My brothers do.»

«And if You meet some Pharisees?»

«You are certainly not the most suitable to convert them. It is just because I will meet some that I want you, James and Judas to go away with the women and with John of Endor and Marjiam before Arbela.»

«Ah!... I see! All right.»

Jesus turns round to the women and blesses them one by one, giving each of them suitable advice.

The Magdalene on bending to kiss the feet of her Saviour asks: «Shall I see You again before I go back to Bethany?»

«Most certainly, Mary. In the month of Ethanim I will be on the lake.»

293. Farewell to the Women Disciples.

3rd October 1945.

The reverential respect of Misace is shown the following morning, when he makes the pilgrims go the first miles on the camels after adjusting their loads, turning them into comfortable cradles for the inexperienced riders. And it is quite funny to see dark or fair-haired heads emerging from bundles and cases, with long hair reaching down to the men's ears, or tresses showing through the women's veils. As the camels are moving very fast, the wind now and again blows back the veils and the bright golden hair of Mary Magdalene or the milder fair hair of the Blessed Virgin shines in the sunshine, while the dark or brown-haired heads of Johanna, Syntyche, Martha, Marcella, Susanna and Sarah show indigo or dark bronze reflections, and the grey-haired heads of Eliza, Salome and Mary Clopas seem to be sprayed with silver dust in the clear warm sun. The

men are proceeding bravely on the new means of transport and Marjiam is laughing happily.

They realise that the merchant's statement is true, when, turning round, they see Bozrah down in the valley, with its towers and high houses in the labyrinth of the narrow streets. Low hills appear to the north-west. The road to Aera runs at their feet; the caravan stops to let the pilgrims dismount and part. The camels kneel down with remarkable pitching which makes more than one woman scream. I now see that wisely the women had been fastened to the saddles with belts. The women are somewhat stunned with so much rolling, but they are well rested.

Misace dismounts as well; he had taken Marjiam up on his saddle, and while the cameleers resettle the loads in the usual way, he approaches Jesus to bid Him goodbye once again.

«Thank you, Misace. You have saved us a lot of fatigue and time.»

«Yes. We have covered twenty miles in a short time. The camels have long legs, even if they do not amble smoothly. I do hope that the women have not suffered too much because of that.» All the women reassure him that they are well rested and have not suffered.

«You are now six miles from Arbela. May Heaven accompany you and make your journey smooth. Goodbye, my Lord. Allow me to kiss Your holy feet. I am happy to have met You, Lord. Remember me.» Misace kisses Jesus' feet, he mounts again and his cry makes the camels rise... And the caravan leaves at a gallop on the flat road, in a cloud of dust.

«A good man! I am all bruised, but in compensation, my feet have had a rest. But how much knocking! A north wind storm on the lake is nothing in comparison! Are you laughing? But I did not have the cushions the women had. Long live my boat! It is still the cleanest and safest thing. And now let us pick up our bags and move on.»

They compete with one another in loading themselves. The winners are those who will be staying with Jesus, that is, Matthew, the Zealot, James and John, Ermasteus and Timoneus, who take everything to spare the three who will be going with the women, or rather the four, because there is also John of Endor, whose help must be very relative, owing to the poorly state he is in.

They walk fast for a few miles. When they reach the top of a low hill which

acted as a screen to the west, a fertile plain appears, surrounded by a ring of hills, which are higher than the one they met previously, and in the middle of the plain there is a long isolated hill. There is a town in the plain: Arbela. They descend and are soon in the plain.

They proceed for a little while, then Jesus stops saying: «This is where we part. Let us take our food together and then we shall part. This is the cross-road to Gadara. You will take that road. It is the shortest one and before evening you will be in the territory watched over by Chuza.»

There is not much enthusiasm... But they obey.

While taking their food Marjiam says: «Well, it is also the moment to give You this pouch. The merchant gave it to me when I was in the saddle with him. He said to me: "You will give it to Jesus before parting from Him and you will tell Him to love me as He loves you." Here it is. It was heavy here, in my tunic. It seems to be full of stones.»

«Let us see! Money is heavy!» They are all curious.

Jesus undoes the thin twisted leather strips which fasten the pouch made with gazelle leather, I think, because it looks like chamois leather, and empties its contents on His lap. Some coins roll out. But they are the least. Many small bags of very fine byssus roll out as well: little bundles tied with a thread. Beautiful hues shine through the very light linen tissue and the sun seems to light a tiny fire in each little bundle, as if they were embers under a thin veil of ash.

«What is it? Undo them, Master.»

They are all bending over Jesus Who calmly unties the knot of a little bundle shining with golden reflections: topazes of various sizes, still unrefined, sparkle freely in the sun. Another little bundle: rubies, drops of coagulated blood. Another one: a precious delightful display of green emerald chips. Another one: bits of sky in pure sapphires. Another one: languid amethysts. Another: violet indigo of beryls. Another: wonderful black onyxes... And so on for twelve little bundles. In the last one, the heaviest, a golden sparkling of chrysolites, there is a small parchment: «For Your Rational (1) of true Pontiff and King».

Jesus' lap is a little meadow strewn with bright stripped petals... The apostles plunge their hands into that light which has become many-coloured matter. They are bewildered...

Peter whispers: «If Judas of Kerioth were here!...»

«Be quiet! It is better that he is not» says Thaddeus resolutely.

Jesus asks for a piece of cloth to make one parcel only of the stones and He is pensive while the others continue commenting.

The apostles say: «That man was rich indeed!» and Peter makes everybody laugh exclaiming: «We have been trotting on a throne of gems. I did not think I was sitting in such splendour. I wish it had been softer! What will You do with it now?»

«I will sell it for the poor.» He looks up at the women smiling.

«And where will You find a jeweller here, who can buy those things?»

«Where? Here. Johanna, Martha, Mary, will you buy My treasure?»

The three women, without even consulting with one another, say: «Yes» impulsively. But Martha adds: «We have little money here.»

«You will let Me have it at Magdala at the new moon.»

«How much do You want, Lord?»

«For Myself, nothing. For My poor, very much.»

«Give me it. You will have very much» says the Magdalene, and she takes the purse and conceals it in her breast.

Jesus keeps only the money. He stands up. He kisses His Mother, His aunt His cousins and then he kisses Peter, John of Endor and Marjiam. He blesses the women and dismisses them. And they go away, looking back now and again, until they disappear round a bend.

Jesus goes with the rest towards Arbela. It is only a small group now, only eight people in all. They walk fast without speaking towards the town which is becoming closer and closer.

(1) The Rational was the precious pectoral of judgement worn by the High Priest when he went into the presence of Yahweh (See Exodus 28, 15-30).

294. At Arbela.

4th October 1945.

The very first person they approach when inquiring about Philip of Jacob makes them realise how much work the young disciple has done. The person they asked is a little old wrinkled woman, who is carrying with difficulty a jug full of water. Gazing with her little deep-set eyes at the handsome face of John who asked her the question, after greeting her «Peace be with you» so gently as to enrapture her, she says: «Are you the Messiah?»

«No. But I am His disciple. He is coming, He is over there.»

The old woman puts her jug on the ground and hobbles in the direction pointed out to her and kneels down in front of Jesus.

John, who has remained with Simon near the pitcher which has turned over spilling half of its contents, says to his companion smiling: «We had better pick up this jug and join the old woman.» He does so while his companion adds: «We can use it to drink. We are all thirsty.»

When they reach the old woman – who not knowing what to say exactly continues to repeat: «Lovely, holy Son of the most holy Mother» still on her knees and drinking in with her eyes the figure of Jesus, Who smiles at her repeating in His turn: «Stand up, mother» – when they reach her, John says to her: «We have taken your jug. But it turned over and there is little water left in it. If you give it to us, we will drink this water and then we will fill the jug for you.»

«Yes, my sons, of course. And I am sorry that I have but water for you. I wish I had milk in my breast as when I fed my Judas, in order to give you the sweetest thing there is on the earth: the milk of a mother. I would like to have wine, choice wine, to strengthen you. But Marianne of Elisha is old and poor...»

«Your water is wine and milk to Me, mother, because it is given with love» replies Jesus and He is the first to drink out of the jug handed to Him by John. Then the others drink.

The old woman, who has at last stood up, looks at them as if she were looking at Paradise and when, after they have all drunk, she sees that they are about to

throw away the water left in the jug, to fill it at the fountain gurgling at the end of the street, she rushes forward, defending her jug and saying: «No, don't. This water is more holy than lustral water, as He drank out of it. I will keep it carefully so that I may be cleansed with it when I die.» And she seizes her jug saying: «I will take it home. I have some more and I will fill them. But come first, o Holy One, that I may show You Philip's house» and she trots along swiftly, all bent, with a smile on her wrinkled face and her little eyes shining with joy. She trots along holding the hem of Jesus' mantle in her hand, as if she were afraid He might run away from her, and she defends her jug from the insistent apostles, who do not want her to carry that weight. She trots along blissfully, looking at the street and the houses in Arbela, the former deserted, the latter already closed as it is getting dark, and she looks like a conquerer, happy in her victory.

Finally, they pass from the side street into a more central one, where there are people hastening home – and the people watch her spellbound, pointing at her and questioning her – and, after waiting to have a circle of people around her, she shouts: «I have here Philip's Messiah. Run and tell everybody and first of all Jacob's household. So that they may be ready to honour the Saint.» She shouts at the top of her voice. She can make herself obeyed. It is the moment of authority of a poor, lonely, unknown little old woman of the people. And she sees the whole town deeply moved by her command.

Jesus, so much taller than she is, smiles at her when she looks at Him now and again and He lays His hand on her venerable head, in a filial caress which overwhelms her with happiness.

Jacob's house is in a central street. It is open and lit up and through the door one can see a long hall in which there are people holding lights, and they rush out joyfully as soon as Jesus appears in the street: the young disciple Philip, his father and mother, relatives, servants and friends.

Jesus stops and replies gravely to Jacob's deep bow, He then bends over Philip's mother who has knelt down to revere Him, and He makes her stand up blessing her and saying: «Be always happy because of your faith.» He then greets the disciple who has come with the other man who was with him, and whom Jesus greets as well.

Old Marianne, however, does not leave the hem of the mantle or her place beside Jesus until they are about to enter the entrance hall. She then whispers:

«Bless me that I may be happy! You will now stay here... I am going to my poor house and... and this beautiful thing is all over!» How much regret there is in her ageing voice!

Jacob, to whom his wife has spoken in a low voice, says: «No, Marianne of Elisha. Stay in my house as if you were a disciple. Stay as long as the Master will be with us and be thus happy.»

«May God bless you, man. You know what charity is.»

«Master... she brought You to my house. You have brought me grace and love. I am only giving back, and in a poor way, what I have received from You and from her so abundantly. Come in, and let my house welcome You.»

The crowds outside in the street see them go in and shout: «And what about us? We want to hear His word.»

Jesus turns round: «It is night and you are tired. Prepare your souls through a holy rest and tomorrow you will hear the Voice of God. For the time being, peace and blessings be with you.» And the front door closes on the happiness of this house.

James of Zebedee watches the Lord during the purification after the journey: «Perhaps it was better to speak at once and depart at dawn. There are some Pharisees in town. Philip told me. They will vex You.»

«Those who might have been vexed by them are far away. The trouble they may cause Me is of no importance. There is love that will cancel it...»

The following morning... Jesus goes out among the joyful relatives of Philip and the apostles. The old woman follows them. He meets the people of Arbela who are patiently waiting for Him. He goes to the main square where He begins to speak.

«We read in the eighth chapter of the second book of Ezra, what I will now repeat to you: “When the seventh month came...” (Jesus says to me: “Do not write anything else. I will repeat the words of the book in full”).

...

When does a people return to its country? When it goes back to the land of its ancestors. I have come to take you back to the land of your Father, to the Kingdom of the Father. And I can do that because I was sent for that. So I have

come to take You to the Kingdom of God and it is therefore fair to compare you to those who repatriated with Zorobabel to Jerusalem, the city of the Lord, and it is fair to do with you what Ezra the scribe did with the people gathered once again within the sacred walls. Because it is incomparable foolishness to rebuild a town dedicating it to the Lord, without restoring souls, which are like as many little towns of God.

How can these little spiritual towns, dilapidated by so many events, be restored? Which materials should be used to make them solid, beautiful, lasting? The materials are in the precepts of the Lord: the ten commandments, of which you are aware, because Philip, a son of your town and My disciple, has reminded you of them. The two most holy of the holy precepts are: "Love God with your whole being. Love your neighbour as yourself." They sum up the Law. And I preach them because through them you are certain to conquer the Kingdom of God. In love you find the strength of persevering in holiness or becoming holy, the strength of forgiveness, the strength of heroism in virtue. Everything can be found in love. Fear does not save: the fear of the judgement of God, the fear of human sanctions, the fear of diseases. Fear is never constructive. It shakes, shatters, throws into disorder, it crushes. Fear leads to despair, it leads only to crafty concealment of evil-doing, it makes one fear when fear is useless, because evil is already within us.

Who thinks of behaving wisely, for the sake of his body, when one is healthy? No one. But as soon as the first shiver of fever runs through our veins or a stain makes us think of unclean diseases, then fear becomes an added torture to the disease and it becomes a disintegrating strength in a body already broken down by illness. Love instead is constructive. It builds, solidifies, unites and preserves. Love brings hope in God. Love removes from evil-doing. Love makes man deal wisely with his own person, which is not the centre of the universe, as egotists believe and make it, the false lovers of themselves, because they love one part only: the less noble one, to the detriment of the immortal and holy part; but which it is our duty to preserve healthy, as long as God so wishes, in order to be useful to ourselves, to our relatives, to our town and to the whole country.

Diseases inevitably come. It is not true that every disease is the consequence of vice or punishment. There are holy diseases sent by the Lord to His just people, so that in the world, which considers itself the end and the means of pleasure, there may be holy people who are like war-hostages for the safety of others, and they pay personally expiating through their suffering, the portion of guilt which

the world daily accumulates and which would end by crashing on Mankind, burying it under its malediction.

Do you remember old Moses praying while Joshua was fighting in the name of the Lord? You must consider that those who suffer holily, give the greatest battle to the fiercest warrior there is in the world, concealed under the appearances of men and peoples, to Satan, the Torturer, the Origin of all evils, and they fight on behalf of all men. But how much difference there is between such holy diseases sent by God, and those caused by vice through a sinful love of senses! The former are a proof of God's merciful will; the latter are a proof of diabolical corruption. It is therefore necessary to love, in order to be holy, because love creates, preserves and sanctifies.

Like Nehemiah and Ezra, I also, announcing this truth, say to you: "This day is sacred to the Lord our God. Do not be mournful, do not weep." Because all mourning ends, when one lives the day of the Lord. The harshness of death comes to an end, because the loss of a son, of a husband, a father, mother or brother becomes a temporary and limited separation. Temporary because it ends with our death. Limited because it is confined to the body and sense. Our soul does not lose anything when a relative of ours dies. Its freedom is limited in one party only, in us, as survivors with our souls still enclosed in the flesh, while the other party, the one who has passed to second life, enjoys the liberty and power to watch over us and obtain for us much more than when it loved us from the prison of its body.

Like Nehemiah and Ezra I say to you: "Go, eat the fat meat, drink the sweet wine and send a portion to the man who has none, for this day is sacred to the Lord, and therefore nobody must suffer during it. Do not be sad, because the joy of the Lord Who is among you, is the stronghold of those who receive the grace of the Most High Lord within their walls and in their hearts."

You can no longer erect Tabernacles. Their time is over. But erect spiritual ones in your hearts. Climb the mountain, that is, rise towards Perfection. Gather branches of olive, myrtle, palm, oak, hyssop and of every beautiful tree. Branches of the virtues of peace, purity, heroism, mortification, strength, hope, justice, of all virtues. Adorn your souls celebrating the feast of the Lord. His Tabernacles are awaiting you. His. And they are beautiful, holy, eternal, open to all those who live in the Lord. And together with Me, decide today to do penance for the past and to begin a new life.

Do not be afraid of the Lord. He calls you because He loves you. Be not afraid. You are His children like everybody in Israel. Also for you He created the Universe and Heaven, He sent Abraham and Moses, He opened the sea, He created the guiding cloud, He descended from Heaven to give the Law, and He opened the clouds that they might rain manna, and He made the rocks fruitful that they might give water. And now for you also He is sending the living Bread of Heaven to satisfy your hunger and the true Vine and the Fountain of eternal Life to quench your thirst. And through My lips He says to you: "Enter and possess the Land over which I have raised My hand to give it to you." My spiritual Land: the Kingdom of Heaven.»

The crowds exchange enthusiastic words... Then it is the turn of sick people. There are so many. Jesus has them lined up in two rows, and while this is being done, He asks Philip of Arbela: «Why did you not cure them?»

«That they might have what I had: to be cured by You.»

Jesus passes blessing the sick people one by one and the usual prodigy is repeated: the blind see, the deaf hear, the dumb speak, cripples stand straight, fever and weakness cease.

The healing is over. At the end, after the last sick person, there are the two Pharisees who went to Bozrah together with two more. «Peace to You, Master. Are You not saying anything to us?»

«I spoke to everybody.»

«But we do not need those words. We are the saints of Israel.»

«To you, who are masters, I say: comment upon the subsequent chapter, the ninth of the second book of Ezra, remembering how many times so far God has had mercy on you, and repeat the end of the chapter, as if it were a prayer, beating your chests.»

«Quite right, Master, quite right. And do Your disciples do it?»

«They do. It is the first thing I exact of them.»

«All of them? Also the murderers who are in Your group?»

«Does blood smell bad to you?»

«It is a voice crying to Heaven.»

«Then do not imitate those who shed it.»

«We are not assassins!»

Jesus gazes at them piercing them with His eyes. They dare not add one word for some time. But they follow the group which goes back to the house of Philip, who feels bound to invite them to enter and join in the banquet.

«With great pleasure! We will stay longer with the Master» they say bowing very low.

But once in the house they behave like bloodhounds... They watch, they peek, they ask the servants astute questions, and they approach even the old woman, who seems to be attracted by Jesus as iron is by a magnet. But she replies promptly: «Yesterday I saw these only. You must be dreaming. I brought them here, and there was only one John: that fair-haired boy who is as good as an angel.»

They fulminate against the old woman and turn elsewhere. But a servant, without replying to them directly, bends over Jesus, who is sitting speaking to the landlord, and asks Him: «Where is John of Endor? This gentleman is looking for him.»

The Pharisee casts a withering glance at the servant and stigmatises him as a «fool». But Jesus is now aware of their intentions and it is necessary to remedy in the best possible manner. The Pharisee says: «It was to congratulate You, Master, on this wonder of Your doctrine and honour You through the convert.»

«John is far away for good and he will be farther and farther away.»

«Has he relapsed into sin?»

«No. He is ascending towards Heaven. Imitate him, and you will find him in the next life.»

The four do not know what to say and they wisely change the subject. The servants announce that the meal is ready and they all go into the dining-room.

295. Going to Aera.**6th October 1945.**

Arbela also is now far away. In the group there are also Philip of Arbela and the other disciple, whose name I hear is Mark.

The road is muddy because of the heavy rain. The sky is overcast. A little river, but quite worthy of this name, crosses the road to Aera. Swollen with the rain which has stormed in this area it is certainly not sky-blue; it is reddish yellow as if the water had been flowing through ferrous ground.

«The weather is now bad. You did the right thing in sending the women away. It is no longer the season for them to be on the roads» states James sententiously.

And Simon the Zealot, who is always calm in his devotion to the Master, proclaims: «Everything He does, the Master does well. He is not dull like us. He sees and arranges everything for the best, and more to our behalf than to His own.»

John, who is happy to be beside Him, looks up at Him with a smiling face and exclaims: «You are the dearest and best Master the earth ever had, has or will have, besides being the most holy.»

«Those Pharisees... What a disappointment! Also the bad weather has helped to convince them that John of Endor was not there. But why are they so hostile to him?» asks Ermasteus, who is very fond of John of Endor.

Jesus replies: «Their hatred is not against him or because of him. He is an implement which they manoeuvre against Me.»

Philip of Arbela says: «Well the rain has more than convinced them that it was useless to wait for and suspect John of Endor. Long live the rain! It served also to keep You in my house for five days.»

«I wonder how worried those at Aera are! It is surprising that my brother has not come to meet us» says Andrew.

«Meet us? He will be following us» remarks Matthew.

«No. He was taking the road along the lake. Because he was going from Gadara to the lake and by boat to Bethsaida to see his wife and tell her that the boy is at Nazareth and that he will be soon going back. From Bethsaida through Merom he will take the road to Damascus for a little while, and then the road to Aera.

He is certainly at Aera.»

There is silence. Then John says smiling: «But that little old woman, Lord!»

«I thought that You were going to grant her the joy of dying on Your chest, as You did with Saul of Kerioth» remarks Simon Zealot.

«I have loved her even more. Because I will wait to call her to Me, when the Christ is about to open the gates of Heaven. The little mother will not have to wait long for Me. She now lives with her remembrance, and with the assistance of your father, Philip, her life will not be so sad. I bless you and your relatives once again.»

John's joy is darkened by a cloud thicker than the ones in the sky. Jesus notices it and asks: «Are you not glad that the old woman will soon be coming to Paradise?»

«Yes... but I am not as it means that You will be going... Why die, Lord?»

«Those who are born of woman, die.»

«Will You have her only?»

«Oh! no! How joyfully will those proceed, whom I save as God, and whom I loved as man...»

They cross two more little rivers, one close to the other. It is beginning to rain on the flat region which stretches in front of the pilgrims after they have climbed the hills at the junction with the road, which follows a valley and runs northwards. A mighty mountain chain appears to the north, or rather to the north-west, but more north than west, with many clouds piling on the mountain tops, forming almost unreal new tops on the real ones, covered with woods on the sides and with snow on the peaks. But the chain is very far away.

«There is water down here, and snow up there. That is the chain of the Hermon. It has covered its summit with a large white blanket. If there is sunshine at Aera, you will see how beautiful it looks when the sun tinges the high peak with pink» says Timoneus, who is urged by the love for his fatherland to praise the beauty of the country.

«But it is raining now. Is Aera still far?» asks Matthew.

«Yes, very. We shall not be there until this evening.»

«In that case, may God save us from aches and pains» concludes Matthew, who is not very keen on walking in such weather.

They are all wrapped up in their mantles, under which they hold their travelling sacks to protect them from dampness, so that they may change their clothes on arrival, as the ones they are wearing are dripping wet and the bottom parts are heavy with mud.

Jesus is ahead of them, engrossed in thought. The others are nibbling at their pieces of bread and John says jokingly: «There is no need to look for fountains to quench our thirst. It is enough to hold sore heads back and open our mouths and the angels will give us water.» Ermasteus, who being young is like Philip of Arbela and John so lucky as to take everything humorously, says: «Simon of Jonah was complaining of the camels. But I would rather be on one of those towers shaken by an earthquake than in this mud. What do you think?»

And John: «I say that I am comfortable everywhere, providing Jesus is there...»

The three young men go on talking incessantly. The four older ones quicken their steps and reach Jesus. The remaining couple, that is, Timoneus and Mark follow the rest speaking...

«Master, Judas of Simon will be at Aera...» says Andrew.

«Of course. And Thomas, Nathanael and Philip will be with him.»

«Master... I will regret these peaceful days» says James with a sigh.

«You must not say that, James.»

«I know... But I cannot help it...» and he draws another deep sigh.

«There will be also Simon Peter with My brothers. Does that not make you happy?»

«It does, very much! Master, why is Judas of Simon so different from us?»

«Why do rain and sunshine, warm and cold, light and darkness alternate?»

«Because it is not possible to have the same situation all the time. Life would come to an end on the earth.»

«Quite right, James.»

«Yes, but that has got nothing to do with Judas.»

«Tell Me. Why are all the stars not like the sun, that is, huge, warm, beautiful, mighty?»

«Because... because the earth would go on fire with so much heat.»

«Why are the trees not all like those walnut-trees? By trees I mean all vegetables.»

«Because animals would not be able to eat of them.»

«Well, why are they not all like grass?»

«Because... we would have no wood to light fires, to build houses, to make tools, carts, boats, furniture.»

«Why are the birds not all eagles, and the animals are not all elephants or camels?»

«We would be in a mess if it were so!»

«So, do you think that such varieties are a good thing?»

«Undoubtedly.»

«So you think... Why, according to you, did God make them?»

«To give us all possible help.»

«So, for a good purpose. Are you sure?»

«As I am sure that I am now alive.»

«Well, if you consider that it is right that there should be different kinds of animals, vegetables and stars, why do you expect all men to be alike? Each man has his mission and his temperament. Do you think that the infinite variety of species is a sign of the power or powerlessness of the Creator?»

«Of His power. One species enhances another.»

«Very well. Judas also serves the same purpose, as you do with your companions, and your companions with you. You have thirty-two teeth in your mouth and if you examine them carefully, you will see that one is quite different from another. Not only in their three basic groups, but each individually in its group. And consider their task when you eat. You will see that also those which seem of little use and to be doing little work, are instead the ones which fulfill the first task of breaking the bread and conveying it to others which crunch it

and then pass it to others which turn it into soft pulp. Is it not so? You think that Judas does nothing or does wrong. I remind you that he evangelized southern Judaea very well, and, as you said yourself, he is very tactful with Pharisees.»

«That is true.»

Matthew remarks: «He is also very clever in collecting money for the poor. He can ask for it better than I can... Probably because money disgusts me now.»

Simon Zealot bends his head and he blushes so much that his face turns crimson.

Andrew notices it and asks him: «Are you not feeling well?»

«No... Fatigue... I don't know.»

Jesus gazes at him and he blushes more and more. But Jesus does not say anything.

Timoneus comes forward running: «Master, over there you can see the village before Aera. We can stop there or get some donkeys.»

«The rain is now ceasing. It is better to go on.»

«As You wish, Master. But, if You allow, I will go ahead.»

«You may go.»

Timoneus runs away with Mark. And Jesus remarks smiling: «He wants us to have a triumphal entrance.»

They are all together in a group once again. Jesus lets them get excited talking about the difference of regions and He then withdraws to the rear of the group taking the Zealot with Him. As soon as they are alone He asks: «Why did you blush, Simon?»

The apostle turns crimson again but does not reply. Jesus repeats His question. Simon blushes more and more but remains silent. Jesus asks him once again.

«My Lord, You already know! Why do You want me to tell You?» shouts the Zealot sorrowfully, as if he were tortured.

«Are you certain?»

«He did not deny it. But he said: "I do so because I am provident. I have common sense. The Master never thinks of the future." Which we can say is true. But... it is always... it is always... Master, tell me the right word.»

«It is always a proof that Judas is only a "man." He cannot elevate himself to be a spirit. But, you are all more or less alike. You are afraid of silly things. You worry about useless providence. You cannot believe that Providence is powerful and always present. Well: let us keep that to ourselves. All right?»

«Yes, Master.»

There is silence. Then Jesus says: «We shall soon be going back to the lake... A little concentration after so much travelling will be lovely. You and I will be going to Nazareth for some time, towards the feast of the Dedication. You are alone... The others will be with their families. You will stay with Me.»

«My Lord, Judas, Thomas and Matthew are also alone.»

«Do not worry about that. Everyone will celebrate the festivity in his own family. Matthew has a sister. You are alone. Unless you want to go to Lazarus...»

«No, Lord» exclaims Simon. «No. I love Lazarus. But to be with You is to be in Paradise. Thank You, Lord» and he kisses Jesus' hand.

They have just left the little village behind when, in another heavy shower Timoneus and Mark appear on the flooded road shouting: «Stop! Simon Peter is coming with some donkeys. I met him on the way. He has been coming for three days to this place with the donkeys, always in the rain.»

They stop under a thicket of oak-trees which shelter them somewhat from the downpour. And then Peter appears riding a donkey and leading a line of donkeys; he looks like a friar under the blanket which covers his head and shoulders.

«May God bless You, Master! I said that He would be drenched like one who had fallen into the lake! Come on, quick, all of you, mount the donkeys, because Aera has been on fire for three days, as the people have kept the fireplaces lit to dry You! Quick... Look what a state He is in! But you... could you not keep Him back? Ah! if I am not there! But I say: just look at that! His hair is hanging as if he were drowned. You must be frozen. In all this rain! How thoughtless! And what about you all? You reckless ones! And you first of all, my stupid brother, and all the rest of you. How pretty you all look! You are like sacks soaked in a pond. Come on, quick. I will never trust Him to you again. I am almost dying with horror...»

«And with talking, Simon» says Jesus calmly while His donkey trots along

beside Peter's at the head of the caravan of donkeys. Jesus repeats: «And with talking. And with talking uselessly. You have not told Me whether the others have arrived. Whether the women left. Whether your wife is well. You have told Me nothing.»

«I will tell You everything. But why did You leave in all this rain?»

«And why did you come?»

«Because I was anxious to see You, my Master.»

«Because I was anxious to join you, My Simon.»

«Oh! My dear Master! How much I love You! Wife, boy, house? They are nothing, nothing is beautiful without You. Do You believe that I love You so much?»

«I do. I know who you are, Simon.»

«Who?»

«A big boy full of little faults, under which so many lovely qualities are buried. But one is not buried. And that is your honesty in everything. Well, who was there at Aera?»

«Your brothers Judas and James, Judas of Kerioth with the others. Judas seems to have done a lot of good. Everybody praises him...»

«Did he ask you any questions?»

«Oh! So many! I did not reply to any of them, I said that I did not know anything. In fact, what do I know, except that I took the women as far as Gadara? You know... I did not tell him anything about John of Endor. He thinks that John is with You. You ought to tell the others.»

«No. Like you, they do not know where John is. There is no point in saying anything else. But all these donkeys!... For three days!... What an expense! And the poor?»

«The poor... Judas has loads of money and he sees to them. The donkeys cost me nothing. The people of Aera would have given me a thousand for You, without any charge. I had to raise my voice against them to avoid coming here with an army of donkeys. Timoneus is right. Everybody believes in You here. They are better than we are...» and he sighs.

«Simon, Simon! In Trans-Jordan they honoured us; a galley-slave, some heathen women, prostitutes, women gave you a lesson in perfection. Remember that, Simon of Jonah. Always.»

«I will try, Lord. Here are the first people from Aera. Look how many! There is the mother of Timoneus. There are Your brothers among the crowds. There are the disciples whom You sent ahead of those who came with Judas of Kerioth. And there is the richest man in Aera with his servants. He wanted You to stay in his house. But Timoneus' mother asserted her rights and You will be staying with her. Look, look! They are irritated because the rain is putting out their torches. There are many sick people, You know. They remained in town, near the gates, to see You at once. A man who owns a timber store sheltered them under the sheds. The poor people have been there for three days, since we arrived and we were surprised that You were not here.»

The shouts of the crowds prevent Peter from going on speaking, so he becomes quiet riding beside Jesus like an equerry. The crowds, whom they have now reached, part and Jesus passes through them on his little donkey, blessing them unceasingly. They enter the town.

«To the sick people at once» says Jesus, Who pays no attention to the protestations of those who would like to take Him into their houses to give Him food and warmth, lest He might suffer too much. «They suffer more than I do» He replies.

They turn right and there is the rustic enclosure of the timber store. The door is wide open and complaining lamentations can be heard through it: «Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us!»

It is an imploring chorus as unchanging as a litany: voices of children, of women, of men, of old people. They are as sad as the bleating of suffering lambs, as melancholy as the voices of dying mothers, as dejected as the voices of those who have but one hope left, as trembling as the voices of those who can but weep...

Jesus enters the enclosure. He stands up as much as He can in the stirrups and with His right hand up He says with His powerful voice: «To all those who believe in Me, health and blessing.»

He sits in the saddle once again and is about to go back to the road, but the crowds press Him and the cured people throng round Him. And in the light of

the torches, which burn in the shelter of the sheds and illuminate the twilight, the crowds can be seen acclaiming the Lord in a frenzy of joy. And the Lord disappears in a flowery collection of cured children, whom mothers have put on His arms, on His lap and even on the neck of the little donkey, holding them so that they might not fall. Jesus' arms are full of them, as if they were flowers, and He smiles happily, kissing them as He cannot bless them, since His arms are engaged in supporting them. The children are then taken away, and it is the turn of the old people who have also been cured and are now weeping out of joy; they kiss His mantle and are followed by the men and women...

It is dark when He can enter Timoneus' house and rest near the fire wearing dry clothes.

296. Jesus Preaches at Aera.

7th October 1945.

Jesus is speaking in the main square at Aera:

«...And I am not going to tell you, as I did elsewhere, the first and essential things you must know and do to be saved. You know them very well, through the work of Timoneus, a wise head of the synagogue of the old Law, who is now most wise, because he renews it in the light of the new Law. But I want to warn you against a danger which you cannot see in your present state of mind. The danger of being diverted by pressure and insinuations aiming at detaching you from the faith you have now in Me. I will leave Timoneus with you for some time. And with other disciples he will explain to you the words of the Book in the new light of my Truth which he has embraced. But before leaving you, and after scanning your hearts and seeing that they are willing, humble and sincere in their love, I want to comment with you upon a point of the fourth book of Kings.

When Hezekiah, king of Judah, was attacked by Sennacherib, the three great men of the hostile king came to him to terrorise him, pointing out to him the alliances which had been broken off and the armies which were already surrounding him. Eliakim, Shebna and Joah replied to the words of the powerful messengers saying: "Speak to us in such a way that the people may not

understand you" so that the terrorised people might not ask for peace. But that was what the messengers of Sennacherib wanted, and at the top of their voices they said in perfect Hebrew: "Do not let Hezekiah delude you... Do with us what is useful to you and surrender and everyone of you will eat the fruit of his own vine and of his own fig-tree and drink the water of his own cistern until we come and deport you to a country like your own, a land of corn and good wine, a land abounding in bread and vineyards, a land of olive-trees, of oil and of honey, and you will live and will not die..." And it is written: "The people did not reply, because the king had ordered them not to reply."

Now, out of pity for your souls besieged by forces which are even fiercer than those of Sennacherib, who was able to harm bodies but could not damage souls, whereas war is declared to your souls by a hostile army led by the fiercest and most cruel despot there is in creation, I prayed his messengers, who, in order to damage Me through you, endeavour to terrorise both Me and you threatening dreadful punishments, I prayed saying: "Speak to Me only. But leave in peace the souls which are now being born to the Light. Vex Me, torture Me, accuse Me, kill Me, but do not rage against these children of the Light. They are still weak. One day they will be strong. But now they are weak. Do not be merciless towards them. Do not be merciless against the freedom of souls to choose their own way. Do not be pitiless towards the right of God of calling to Himself those who seek Him in their simple love."

But can one who hates yield to the prayer of him whom one hates? Can one seized by hatred know what love is? No. So with fiercer harshness and cruelty they will come and say to you: "Do not let the Christ delude you. Come with us and you will have all good things." And they will say to you: "Woo betide you if you follow Him. You will be persecuted." And they will urge you with insincere kindness: "Save your souls. He is Satan." They will say so many things against Me, to persuade you to abandon the Light.

I say to you: "Reply to the tempters with your silence." When the Strength of the Lord descends into the hearts of those who believe in Jesus Christ, the Messiah and Saviour, then you will be able to speak, because you will not speak, but the very Spirit of God will speak through your lips, and your souls will be firm in Grace, strong and invincible in Faith.

Be persevering. That is all I ask of you. Remember that God cannot agree to the witchcraft of His enemy. Let your sick people, those who have been comforted and whose souls have received peace, speak among you, only through their

presence, of Him Who came among you to say to you: “Persevere in My love and in My doctrine and you will receive the Kingdom of Heaven.” My works speak even more than My words, and although it is perfect blessedness to be able to believe without the need of any proof, I let you see the wonders of God, so that you may be fortified in your faith. When your intelligence is tempted by the enemies of the Light, reply to them with the words of your souls: “I believe because I have seen God in His works.” Reply to the enemies by means of an active silence. And with those two replies, proceed towards the Light. May peace be always with you.»

And He dismisses them and then leaves the square.

«Why did You speak so little to them, Lord? Timoneus might be disappointed» says Nathanael.

«He will not, because he is just and he understands that to warn one of a danger is to love one with greater love. That danger is really present.»

«Always the Pharisees, eh?» asks Matthew.

«Those and others.»

«Are You downhearted, Lord?» asks John worriedly.

«No. Not more than usual...»

«And yet You were happier during the past days...»

«It may be sadness due to the absence of the disciples. But why did You send them away? Do You perhaps wish to go on travelling?» asks the Iscariot.

«No. This is the last place. We will go home from here. But it was not possible for the women to proceed in this weather. They have done a great deal. They must do no more.»

«And what about John?»

«John is ill, and is in a hospitable house, as you were.»

Jesus then takes leave of Timoneus and other disciples who will be remaining in that area and to whom He has certainly given instructions for the future, because He does not give any further advice.

They are at the door of Timoneus' house, because Jesus wanted to bless the landlady once more. The crowds look at Him respectfully and follow Him when

He sets out again towards the outskirts, the vegetable gardens and the open country. The more persevering people follow Him for a little while, in a group which becomes thinner and thinner, until only nine people are left, then five, three, finally one... And the last one, too, turns round and goes back to Aera, while Jesus walks westwards, with only the twelve apostles, because Ermasteus remained with Timoneus.

Jesus says:

«And the journey, the second long apostolic journey is over. We now go back to the well-known countryside of Galilee.

Poor Mary, you are more exhausted than John of Endor. I authorise you to omit the descriptions of the places. We have given so much to curious searchers. And they will always be “curious searchers.” Nothing else. That is enough now. Your strength is diminishing. Keep it for the word. I notice the uselessness of so much labour of yours, with the same spirit with which I noticed the uselessness of so much of My toil. That is why I say to you: “Spare yourself for the word.” You are the “mouthpiece”. Oh! One must really repeat for you the saying: “We played the pipes for you and you would not sing, we sang dirges and you would not be mourners.” You repeated My words only, and difficult doctors turned up their noses. You added your descriptions to My words, and they find faults with them. And they will find more to object. And you are worn out. I will tell you when you are to describe the journey. I, and no one else.

I have struck you for almost one year. But before the year is over, do you wish to rest once again on My Heart? Come then, little martyr...»

297. The Little Orphans Mary and Matthias.

8th October 1945.

I see the lake of Merom again, in a dull wet day... Mud and clouds. Silence and fog. The horizon disappears in the fog. The Hermon chains are buried under blankets of low clouds. But from the place where I am – a high tableland near the little lake, which is grey and yellowish because of the mud of a thousand swollen little streams and because of the November overcast sky – one has a

good view of this little sheet of water fed by the High Jordan, which flows out of it to feed the larger lake of Gennesaret.

It is getting dark and the evening is becoming more and more gloomy and wet while Jesus walks along the road which crosses the Jordan after lake Merom, and He then takes a lane towards a house...

(Jesus says: «You will put here the vision of the little orphans Matthias and Mary, which you saw on August 20th, 1944.»)

20th August 1944.

Another sweet vision of Jesus and two children. I say so because I see that Jesus, while passing along a path between fields which must have been sown recently, because the soil is still soft and dark as it looks just after being sown, stops to caress two children: a little boy not more than four years old and a little girl about eight or nine. They must be very poor children because they are wearing poor faded garments, which are also torn and their faces are sad and thin.

Jesus does not ask any questions. He only gazes at them while He caresses them. He then hastens towards a house at the end of the path. It is a country house, well built, with an outside staircase leading from the ground up to a terrace on which there is a vine pergola, now bare of grapes and leaves. Only an odd yellow leaf hangs swinging in the damp wind of a bad autumn day. Some doves are cooing on the parapet of the house waiting for the rain which the overcast sky is promising.

Jesus, followed by His apostles, pushes the little rustic gate of the low rubble wall surrounding the house, and enters the yard, which we would rather call a threshing-floor, where there is a well and a stone-oven in a corner. I suppose that is what the little closet is, the walls of which are black with smoke, which is coming out even now and is blown towards the ground by the wind.

Hearing the sound of footsteps a woman looks out of the closet and when she sees Jesus she greets Him joyfully and runs to inform the people in the house.

An elderly stout man comes to the door of the house and hastens towards Jesus. «It is a great honour, Master, to see You!» he exclaims greeting Him.

Jesus greets him: «Peace be with you» and adds: «It is getting dark and it is about to rain. I beg you to give shelter and a piece of bread to Me and My

disciples.»

«Come in, Master. My house is Yours. The maid-servant is about to take the bread out of the oven. I am happy to offer it to You with the cheese of my sheep and the fruit of my fields. Come in, because the wind is cold and damp...» and he kindly holds the door open and bows when Jesus passes. But he suddenly changes tone addressing somebody he sees and he says wrathfully: «Are you still here? Go away. There is nothing for you. Go away. Have you understood? There is no room here for vagabonds...» And he mumbles: «...and perhaps thieves like you.»

A thin weeping voice replies: «Have mercy, sir. At least a piece of bread for my little brother. We are hungry...»

Jesus, Who had gone into the large kitchen, which is cosy because of the big fire which serves also as a light, comes to the threshold. His countenance has already changed. With a severe and sad expression He asks, not the host, but in general, He seems to be asking the silent yard, the bare fig-tree, the dark well: «Who is it that is hungry?»

«I, sir. I and my brother. Just a piece of bread and we shall go away.»

Jesus is by now outside, where it is getting darker and darker because of the twilight and the impending rain. «Come here» He says.

«I am afraid, sir!»

«Come, I tell you. Do not be afraid of Me.»

The poor girl appears from behind the corner of the house. Her little brother is holding on to her shabby little tunic. They look timidly at Jesus and with fear in their eyes at the landlord, who casts a nasty look at them and says: «They are vagabonds, Master. And thieves. Only a little while ago I found her scraping near the oil-mill. She certainly wanted to go and steal something. I wonder where they come from. They do not belong to this area.»

Jesus pays little or no attention to him. He gazes at the little girl's emaciated face and untidy plaits, two pigtailed beside her ears, tied at the ends with strips of a rag. But Jesus' countenance is not severe while He looks at the poor wretch. He is sad, but He smiles to encourage her. «Is it true that you wanted to steal? Tell Me the truth.»

«No, sir. I asked for a little bread, because I am hungry. They did not give me

any. I saw an oily crust over there, on the ground, near the oil-mill and I went there to pick it up. I am hungry, sir. I was given only one piece of bread yesterday and I kept it for Matthias... Why did they not put us into the grave with our mother?» The little girl weeps desolately and her little brother imitates her.

«Do not weep.» Jesus comforts her caressing her and drawing her close to Himself. «Tell Me: where are you from?»

«From the plain of Esdraelon.»

«And have you come so far?»

«Yes, sir.»

«Has your mother been dead long? Have you no father?»

«My father died killed by sunstroke at harvest time and my mother died last month... and the baby she was giving birth to died with her...» She weeps more and more.

«Have you no relative?»

«We come from so far! We were not poor... Then my father had to work as a servant. But he is now dead and mother with him.»

«Who was his master?»

«Ishmael, the Pharisee.»

«Ishmael, the Pharisee! (it is not possible to describe how Jesus repeats that name). Did you come away of your own will, or did he send you away?»

«He sent me away, sir. He said: “The street is the place for starving dogs.”»

«And you, Jacob, why did you not give some bread to these children? Some bread, a little milk and a handful of hay on which they might rest their tired bodies?...»

«But... Master... I have just enough bread for myself... and there is only little milk in the house... They are like stray animals. If you treat them kindly, they will not go away any more...»

«And you have no room and food for these two unhappy children? Can you truthfully say that? The rich crops, the plenty wine, the much oil and fruit which made your estate famous this year, why did they come to you? Do you remem-

ber? The previous year hail destroyed your crops and you were worried about your future life... I came and I asked for some bread. You had heard Me speak one day and you remained faithful to Me... and in your affliction you opened your heart and your house to Me and you gave Me bread and shelter. And what did I say to you going out the following morning? “Jacob, you have understood the Truth. Be always merciful and you will receive mercy. Because of the bread you gave the Son of man, these fields will give you rich crops and your olive-trees will be laden with olives like the grains of sand on the sea shore and the branches of your apple-trees will bend towards the ground.” You received all that and this year you are the richest man in the district. And you refuse two children a piece of bread!...»

«But You were the Rabbi...»

«And because I was, I could have turned stones into bread. They cannot. I now say to you: you shall see a new miracle and you shall regret it very sorely... But beating your chest then say: “I deserved it.”»

Jesus turns to the children: «Do not weep. Go to that tree and pick the fruit.»

«But it is bare, sir» objects the little girl.

«Go.»

The girl goes and comes back with her dress lifted up and full of beautiful red apples.

«Eat of them and come with Me» and to the apostles: «Let us go and take these two little ones to Johanna of Chuza. She remembers the benefits she received and out of love she is merciful to those who were merciful to her. Let us go.»

The dumbfounded and mortified man endeavours to be forgiven: «It is night, Master. It may rain while You are on the way. Come back into my house. There is the maid-servant going to take the bread out of the oven... I will give You some also for them.»

«It is not necessary. You would give it for fear of the punishment I promised you, not out of love.»

«So is this not the miracle?» (and he points at the apples picked on the bare tree and which the two starving children are eating greedily).

«No.» Jesus is most severe.

«Oh! Lord, have mercy on me! I understand. You want to punish me in the crops! Have mercy, Lord!»

«Not all those who call Me “Lord” will have Me, because love and respect are not testified by words, but by deeds. You will receive the mercy which you had.»

«I love You, my Lord.»

«That is not true. *He loves Me who loves his neighbour.* That is what I taught. You love but yourself. When you love Me as I taught, the Lord will come back. I am now going. My abode is to do good, to comfort the afflicted, to wipe the tears of orphans. As a mother hen stretches its wings over the helpless chicks, so I spread My power over those who suffer and are tormented. Come, children. You will soon have a home and bread. Goodbye, Jacob.»

And not satisfied with going away, he orders the apostles to take up the tired girl: Andrew takes her up in his arms and envelops her in his mantle, while Jesus takes the little boy and they thus proceed along the path which is now dark, with their pitiful loads which no longer weep.

Peter says: «Master! These children were very lucky that You arrived. But for Jacob!... What will You do, Master?»

«Justice. He will not starve, because his granaries are well stocked for a long time. But he will suffer shortage, because the seed he sows will yield no corn and his olive and apple-trees will be covered with leaves only. These innocent children have received bread and shelter from the Father, not from Me. Because My Father is the Father of orphans also. And He gives nests and food to the birds of forests. These children and all poor wretches with them, the poor wretches who are His “innocent and loving children” can say that God put food in their little hands and leads them with fatherly love to a hospitable home.»

The vision ends thus and I am left with a great peace.

Jesus says:

«This is just for you, o soul which weeps looking at the crosses of the past and at the clouds of the future. The Father will always have bread to put in your hand and a nest to shelter His weeping dove.

The lesson that I am the “Just Lord” applies to everybody. And I am not deceived or adulated by false homage. *He who closes his heart to his brother,*

closes it to God and God to him.

Men, it is the first commandment: Love and love. *He who does not love lies in professing to be a Christian.* It is useless to frequent the Sacraments and rites, it is useless to pray if one lacks charity. *They become formulae and even sacrileges.* How can you come to the eternal Bread and satisfy your hunger with it, when you have denied a starving person a piece of bread? Is your bread more precious than Mine? Is it more holy? O hypocrites! I put no limit in giving Myself to your misery, and you, who are misery itself, have no pity on the miseries which, in the eyes of God, are not so hideous as yours. Because those are misfortunes, *yours are sins.* Too often you say to Me: “Lord, Lord”, to have Me propitious to your interests. But you do not say so for your neighbour's sake. *You do nothing for your neighbour in the name of the Lord.* Look: what have your false religion and true lack of charity given you, both with regard to your community and to its individuals? To be *abandoned by God.* *And the Lord will come back when you learn to love as I taught.*

But I say to you, little flock of good people who suffer: “You are never orphans. You are never waifs. There would have to be no God, before His children could lack Providence. Stretch out your hands: the Father will give you everything, as a 'father', that is, with love which does not humiliate. Wipe your tears. I will take you and lead you because I have pity on your languor.” Man is the best loved in creation. Can you doubt that the Father may be more merciful to birds than to faithful men, since He is indulgent towards sinners and gives them time and the opportunity to come to Him? Oh! if the world understood what God is!

Go in peace, Mary. You are as dear to Me as the two little orphans you saw, and you are even dearer. Go in peace. I am with you.»

21st August 1944.

Mary says:

«Mary, Mother is speaking. My Jesus has spoken of the infancy of the spirit, a necessary requisite to conquer the Kingdom. Yesterday He showed you a page of His life as a Master. You saw some children. Some poor children. Is there nothing else to be said? Yes, there is, and I am saying it to you, as I want to make you dearer and dearer to Jesus. It is a nuance in the picture which spoke to your spirit, on behalf of the spirits of many people. But it is nuances that make a

picture beautiful and reveal the skill of the painter and the erudition of the observer.

I want to point out the humility of My Jesus to you.

That poor girl, in her ignorant simplicity, does not treat the hard-hearted sinner differently from My Son. She is not aware of the Rabbi or the Messiah. She has never heard Him or seen Him, because she lived, almost like a little savage in the fields and in a house where the Master was despised, in fact the Pharisee did despise My Jesus.

Her father and mother, worn out by the hateful work which their cruel master exacted, had no time and possibility of raising their heads from the clods they broke up. While they were mowing hay or cutting crops or picking fruit and grapes, or crushing olives at the mill, they may have heard people singing hosannas and may have raised their tired heads for a moment. But fear and fatigue lowered those heads at once under their yoke. And they died thinking that the world was nothing but hatred and sorrow. Whereas the world was love and wealth since the most holy feet of My Jesus trod upon it. The poor servants of a cruel master died without seeing even once the look and smile of My Jesus, without hearing His word, which gave comfort to souls, so that the poor felt as if they were rich, the hungry as if they were full, the sick as if they were healthy, the sorrowful as if they were comforted.

Jesus does not say: "I am the Lord and I say to you: do that." He remains anonymous. And the little girl, who was so ignorant that she did not understand even when she saw the miracle of the apple-tree bare of leaves, a branch of which became laden with apples to satisfy their hunger, continues to call Him: "sir", as she called Ishmael, her master, and the cruel Jacob. She feels attracted to the good Lord, because kindness always attracts. But nothing more. She follows Him confidently. And the poor girl lost in the world and in the ignorance encouraged by the world, by the "great world of mighty pleasure-loving people", who are keen in keeping inferiors in darkness in order to torture them more easily and exploit them more greedily, *the poor girl loves Him at once instinctively.*

She will learn later who was that "sir", who was as poor, as homeless and motherless as she was, who had no food, because He had left everything out of His love for men, also for her, a poor little frail girl; and she will understand that the Lord had given her miraculous fruit, to remove from her lips and from her heart the bitterness of human wickedness, which makes poor people hate mighty ones,

and He had done so by means of a fruit of the Father, and not by means of a crust of bread, which was offered too late and in any case would have savoured of hardship and tears. Those apples really called to mind the apple of the Earthly Paradise. They appeared on the branch for Good and for Evil, they were the sign of redemption from all miseries, first of all from the ignorance of God, with regard to the two little orphans, and the sign of punishment for the man, who, although he already was aware of the Word, had behaved as if he were not. And she will learn from the good woman who made her welcome in Jesus' name, who was Jesus. *He was her manifold Saviour:* from starvation, from the inclemency of the weather, from the dangers of the world and from original sin.

But Jesus always had for her the light of that day, and He always appeared to her in that light: the good Lord, as good as in fairy-tales, the Lord Who had caresses and gifts, the Lord Who had made her forget that she had no father, mother, home and clothes, because He had been as kind to her as a father, as sweet as a mother, He had given a home to their tired bodies and clothes to their naked limbs, with His own chest and mantle and with the assistance of other good people who were with Him. *A kind fatherly light which did not fade in a stream of tears,* not even when she learned that He had died tortured on a cross, not even when, a little faithful believer of the early Church, she saw how the face of her "Lord" had been disfigured by blows and thorns and she considered how He was now, in Heaven, at the right hand of the Father. *A light that smiled at her in her last hour on the earth,* leading her fearlessly towards her Saviour. *A light that smiled once again at her,* in such an ineffably sweet manner, *in the splendour of Paradise.*

Jesus looks also at you thus. Always think of Him as your remote namesake did and be happy to be loved by Him. Be as simple, humble, and faithful as the poor little Mary you have known. See how far she arrived, notwithstanding that she was a poor little ignorant girl of Israel: at the Heart of God. Love revealed Himself to her as He did to you and she became learned in the true Wisdom.

Have faith. Be at peace. There is no misery which My Son cannot turn into riches and there is no solitude which He cannot replenish as there is no fault which He cannot cancel. *The past no longer exists, once love has cancelled it.* Not even a dreadful past. Are you going to be afraid when Disma, the robber, was not? *Love and be afraid of nothing.*

Mother leaves you with Her blessing.»

298. Mary and Matthias Are Entrusted to Johanna of Chuza.

11th October 1945.

The lake of Tiberias is a grey sheet of water. It looks like tarnished mercury, so heavy it is in the dead calm which allows just the resemblance of tired waves, which are not successful in making foam, and stop and calm down after making a slight movement, mingling with the dull water under a dull sky.

Peter and Andrew, James and John around their respective boats on the little beach of Bethsaida, are preparing to sail. There is a smell of grass and wet earth, and a light mist on the green stretch towards Korazim. November gloominess lies heavy on everything.

Jesus comes out of Peter's house, holding by the hands Matthias and Mary whom Porphirea has tidied up with motherly care replacing Mary's little dress with one of Marjiam's. But Matthias is too small to have the same treatment and he is still shivering in his little faded cotton tunic, so much so that Porphirea, who is always so full of pity, goes back into the house and brings out a blanket in which she envelops the child as if it were a mantle. Jesus thanks her while she kneels down in taking leave and then withdraws after kissing the two orphans once more.

«Just to have children she would have taken these two as well» remarks Peter, who has been watching the scene and who in turn bends to give the two children a piece of bread spread with honey, which he had aside under a seat of the boat. Andrew laughs at him and says: «You wouldn't, would you? You even stole your wife's honey, to make these two happy.»

«Stole? It's my honey!»

«Yes, but my sister-in-law is jealous of it, because it is for Marjiam. And since you are aware of that, last night you stole into the kitchen, barefooted like a thief, and took enough of it to prepare that bread. I saw you, brother, and I laughed because you were looking about like a child who is afraid of his mother's slaps.»

«You horrible spy» replies Peter, laughing and embracing his brother, who

kisses him saying: «My dear big brother.»

Jesus watches them and smiles frankly standing between the two children who eat up their bread.

The other eight apostles arrive from Bethsaida. Perhaps they were the guests of Philip and Bartholomew.

«Quick!» shouts Peter and he embraces the two children together to take them to the boat without getting their bare feet wet. «You are not afraid, are you?» he asks them while he paddles in the water with his short strong legs, bare to about a span above his knees.

«No, sir» says the girl, but she clings convulsively to Peter's neck closing her eyes when he puts her into the boat, which sways under Jesus' weight, Who also gets into it. The little boy, who is braver, or perhaps more astonished, does not say one word. Jesus sits down drawing the little ones to Himself, and covers them with His large mantle, which looks like a wing stretched out to protect two chicks.

They are all on board, six men in each boat. Peter removes the landing board, he pushes the boat farther out and jumps into it, imitated by James in the other boat. Peter's action has caused the boat to sway heavily and the girl moans:

«Mummy!» hiding her face in Jesus' lap and grasping His knees. But they are now moving smoothly, although it is laborious for Peter, Andrew and the servant who have to row with the help of Philip who is the fourth oarsman. The sail hangs loose in the heavy damp calm and is of no use. They must row.

«We are having a good row!» shouts Peter to those in the other boat, in which the Iscariot is the fourth oarsman and Peter praises his perfect rowing.

«Come on, Simon!» replies James. «Row with all your might or we shall beat you. Judas is as strong as a galley-slave. Well done, Judas!»

«Yes. We will make you head of the crew» confirms Peter who is rowing as hard as two. And he laughs saying: «But you will not succeed in beating Simon of Jonah's record. When I was twenty years old I was already first oarsman in competitions among villages» and he joyfully gives the stroke to his crew: «Heave ho!... Heave ho!» Their voices spread in the silence of the lake deserted in the early morning.

The children pluck up courage again. Their emaciated faces look up from under

the mantle, one on each side of Jesus, Who embraces them, and they smile faintly. They take an interest in the work of the rowers and exchange comments.

«I seem to be going in a cart without wheels» says the boy.

«No. In a cart on the clouds. Look! We seem to be walking in the sky. Look, we are climbing on a cloud!» says Mary when she sees the prow of the boat plunge into a spot which mirrors a huge woolly cloud. And she laughs faintly.

But the sun dissipates the mist and although it is a wan autumn sun, the clouds become golden and the lake mirrors them shining. «Oh! How beautiful! We are now going to a fire. How lovely!» exclaims the boy clapping his hands.

But the little girl becomes silent and bursts into tears. They all ask her why she is weeping. She explains sobbing: «Mother used to say a poem, a psalm, I don't know, to keep us quiet, that we might be able to pray even with so much grief... and the poem mentioned a Paradise which will be like a lake of Light, of a gentle fire where there will be nothing but God and joy and where all those who are good will go... after the Saviour has come... This golden lake reminded me of it... My mummy!»

Matthias also is weeping and everyone pities them.

But Jesus' sweet voice rises above the murmur of the various voices and the moans of the little orphans: «Do not weep. Your mother brought you to Me, and she is here now with us, while I am taking you to a mother who has no children. She will be happy to have two good children in place of her own baby, who is now where your mummy is. Because she wept, too, you know? Her baby died as your mother did...»

«Oh! so we are now going to her and her baby will go to our mother!» says Mary.

«That is right. And you will all be happy.»

«What is this woman like? What is she? A peasant? Has she a good master?» The little ones are anxious to know.

«She is not a peasant, but she has a garden full of roses and she is as good as an angel. She has a good husband. He will love you as well.»

«Do You think so, Master?» asks Matthew who is somewhat incredulous.

«I am certain. And you will be convinced. Some time ago Chuza wanted

Marjiam to make a knight of him.»

«Most certainly not!» shouts Peter.

«Marjiam will be a knight of Christ. That is all, Simon. Be quiet.»

The lake turns grey again. The wind rises and ripples the lake. The sail is filled and the boat sails swiftly along vibrating. But the children are dreaming of their new mother and are not afraid.

Magdala passes by with its white houses among the green vegetation. And the countryside between Magdala and Tiberias passes by. The first houses of Tiberias appear.

«Where, Master?»

«To Chuza's little harbour.»

Peter veers and gives instructions to the servant. The sail drops when the boat goes near the little harbour, and then enters it, stopping near the little pier, followed by the other boat. They are one beside the other like two tired ducks. They all land and John runs ahead to inform the gardeners.

The little ones press timorously against Jesus and Mary, pulling His tunic, asks with a big sigh: «But is she really good?»

John comes back: «Master, a servant is opening the gate. Johanna is already up.»

«Very well. Wait here. I will go ahead.»

And Jesus goes away alone. The others watch Him go commenting on His action more or less favourably. There is considerable doubt and criticism. But from the place where they are they can only see Chuza hastening towards Jesus; he bows almost to the ground at the gate and then enters the garden on Jesus' left. Then nothing else can be seen.

But I can see. I can see Jesus proceeding slowly beside Chuza who shows how happy he is to have the Master as his guest: «My Johanna will be delighted. And I am, too. She is feeling better and better. She told me about the journey. What a triumph, my Lord!»

«Did you mind?»

«Johanna is happy. And I am happy to see her thus. I might have lost her months

ago, my Lord.»

«Yes, you might have... And I gave her back to you. Be grateful to God for that.»

Chuza looks at Him perplexedly... he then whispers: «A reproach, Lord?»

«No, an advice. Be good, Chuza.»

«Master, I am Herod's servant...»

«I know. *But your soul is the servant of no one but God, if you wish so.*»

«That is true, Lord. I will amend my way of living. Sometimes I am seized by the fear of public opinion...»

«Would you have minded last year when you wanted to save Johanna?»

«Oh! No. At the cost of losing all respect I would have applied to anyone who could save her.»

«Do likewise for your soul. It is even more precious than Johanna. Here she is coming.»

They quicken their steps towards Johanna who is running along the avenue to meet them.

«My Master! I did not hope to see You so soon. Which kindness of Yours has brought You to Your disciple?»

«A favour, Johanna.»

«A favour? Which? Tell us and if we can, we will help You» they both reply together.

«Yesterday evening on a desert road I found two poor children, a little girl and a little boy... they were barefooted, ragged, starving, all alone... and I saw them being driven away, as if they were wolves, by a hard-hearted man. They were dying of starvation... Last year I gave so much wealth to that man. And he denied two orphans a piece of bread. Because they are orphans. Orphans wandering on the roads of a cruel world. That man will receive his punishment.

Do you want to receive My blessing? I am stretching My hand out to you, a Beggar of love, for those orphans who have no home, no clothes, no food, no love. Will you help Me?»

«But, Master, why ask? Tell me what You want, how much You want; tell us everything!...» says Chuza impulsively.

Johanna does not speak, but with her hands pressed on her heart, tears on her long eyelashes, a smile of desire on her red lips, she waits and her silence is more eloquent than words.

Jesus looks at her and smiles: «I would like those to have a mother, a father, a home; and the mother's name to be Johanna...»

He has no time to finish because Johanna's cry is like that of one freed from prison, while she prostrates herself to kiss the feet of her Lord.

«And what do you say, Chuza? Will you receive in My name My beloved ones, who are much dearer to My heart than jewels?»

«Master, where are they? Take me to them and upon my honour I swear to You that from the moment I lay my hand on their innocent heads, I will love them in Your name as if I were their real father.»

«Come, then. I knew that I was not coming for nothing. Come. They are coarse and frightened, but good. You can trust Me because I can read the hearts of men and the future. They will give peace and strength to your union, not so much now as in the future. You will find yourselves again in their love. Their innocent embraces will be the best lime for your home of a married couple. And Heaven will always be benign, and merciful towards you because of your charity. They are outside the gate. We came from Bethsaida...»

Johanna does not listen any more. She runs away, seized by a great desire to caress them. And she does so, falling on her knees to clasp the two little orphans to her heart, kissing their emaciated cheeks, while they are amazed looking at the beautiful lady with garments adorned with jewels. And they look at Chuza, who caresses them and takes Matthias in his arms. And they look at the beautiful garden and at the servants who gather round them... And they admire the house which opens its halls full of riches to Jesus and His apostles. And they look at Esther who covers them with kisses. The world of dreams is open to the little waifs...

Jesus watches and smiles...

299. At Nain, in the House of Daniel Raised from the Dead.

12th October 1945.

It is a feast day for the people of Nain. Jesus is their guest for the first time since the miracle of young Daniel, who was raised from the dead.

Jesus is going through the town, blessing, preceded and followed by a large number of people. The people of Nain have been joined by incomers from other villages, who have come from Capernaum, where they had gone looking for Jesus, and from where they were sent to Cana and then to Nain. I am under the impression that now that Jesus has many disciples, He has set up a kind of information network, so that pilgrims looking for Him can find Him, although He moves around continuously, even for a few miles a day, as the season and the short days allow. And among those who have come looking for Him, there are some Pharisees and scribes, apparently respectful...

Jesus is a guest in the house of the young man raised from the dead. The notables of the place have also gathered there. And Daniel's mother, when she sees the scribes and Pharisees – seven of them, like the deadly sins – humbly invites them, apologising for not being able to offer them a worthier abode.

«There is the Master, woman, and that attaches great importance even to a cave. But your house is much more than a cave and we enter it saying: “Peace to you and to your house.”»

The woman in fact, although she is certainly not rich, has done her utmost to honour Jesus. All the wealthy families in Nain have certainly entered the lists, joining their efforts to adorn the house and the table. And the various women who have collaborated are casting glances, from all possible spots, at the group passing through the hall towards two rooms, facing each other, in which the landlady has laid the tables. Perhaps that is all they have asked for, as compensation for the loan of kitchenware, tablecloths and seats, and for their work in the kitchen: to see the Master close at hand and breathe the same air as He does. And now they appear here and there, flushed, covered with flour or ashes, or with dripping hands, according to their tasks in the kitchen, they watch Him closely, they take their little share of divine sight, of divine voice, drinking in with their eyes and ears His kind blessing and figure and look delighted when they go back to the kitchen stove, cupboards and sink, more flushed than ever.

The happiest is the one who offers with the landlady the basins for the ablutions

to the guests of consequence. She is a young dark-haired and dark-eyed girl, but her complexion is suffused with pink. And she blushes even more when the landlady informs Jesus that she is the fiancée of her son and that they will soon be getting married. «We waited for You so that the whole house might be sanctified by You. Please bless her as well, that she may be a good wife in this house.»

Jesus looks at her, and as the little bride bows, He imposes His hands on her head saying: «May the virtues of Sarah, Rebecca and Rachel flourish again in you and may you give birth to true children of God, for His glory and the happiness of this house.»

Jesus and the notables have now completed the purification rite and they enter the dining-room, with the young landlord, while the apostles and less influential persons of Nain go into the opposite room. And the banquet begins.

From their conversation I gather that before my vision began, Jesus had preached and cured in Nain. But the Pharisees and scribes pay little attention to that; they, instead, harass with questions the people of Nain for details of the disease of which Daniel died, of how many hours had elapsed between his death and resurrection, and they ask whether they had completed his embalming etc. etc. Jesus pays no attention to such investigations and converses with the revived man who is very well and is eating with a wonderful appetite.

But a Pharisee calls Jesus to ask Him whether He was aware of Daniel's disease.

«I was coming from Endor by mere chance, as I wanted to please Judas of Kerioth as I had pleased John of Zebedee. I did not even know I would be passing through Nain when I set out on our Passover pilgrimage» replies Jesus.

«Ah! Had you not gone to Endor deliberately?» asks an amazed scribe.

«No. I had not the least intention of going there, at that time.»

«Why did You go then?»

«I told you: because Judas of Simon wanted to go there.»

«And why that fancy?»

«To see the cave of the sorceress.»

«Perhaps You had spoken about it...»

«Never! There was no reason why I should.»

«I mean... perhaps with that episode You explained other witchcraft, to initiate Your apostles in...»

«In what? *To initiate anyone in holiness, there is no need of pilgrimages.* A cell or a desert barren land, a mountain top or a solitary house serve the same purpose: *providing there is austerity and holiness in the teacher, and the will to become holy in the disciple.* That is what I teach and nothing else.»

«But the miracles which Your apostles now work what are they if not wonders and...»

«*The will of God.* That is all. And the more holy they become, the more miracles they will work, *through prayer, sacrifices and obedience to God.* By no other means.»

«Are You sure of that?» asks a scribe holding his chin in his hand and looking Jesus up and down. His tone is rather ironical and pitiful.

«I gave them those weapons and that doctrine. If among them, and they are many, there should be anyone who becomes corrupted through base practices, out of pride or for other reasons, he will not have received such advice from Me. I can pray to see the culprit redeemed. I can undertake hard penance in expiation, imploring God to help him particularly with the light of His wisdom so that he may see his error. I can throw Myself at his feet to entreat him with all My love of Brother, Master and Friend to abandon his sin. *And I would not consider that a humiliation, because the price of a soul is such that it is worth suffering any humiliation to save that soul.* But I can do no more. And if after all he perseveres in his fault, the eyes and heart of the betrayed and misunderstood Master and Friend will shed tears and blood.» How much kindness and sadness there is in Jesus' voice and expression!

The scribes and Pharisees look at one another. They exchange meaningful glances, but say no more on the subject.

They instead ask young Daniel questions. Does he remember what death is? What did he feel when he came back to life? And what did he see in the gap between death and life?

«I know that I was suffering from a mortal disease and I suffered agony. Oh! what a dreadful thing! Don't make me remember it!... And yet the day will come

when I will have to suffer it once again! Oh! Master...» He looks at Him and is so terrified that he goes pale at the idea of having to die once again.

Jesus kindly comforts him saying: «Death is in itself expiation. By dying twice you will be completely cleansed of faults and you will rejoice at once in Heaven. Let this thought make you live a holy life, so that you may have only involuntary and venial faults.»

But the Pharisees return to the attack: «But what did you feel when you came back to life?»

«Nothing. I was alive and healthy as if I had awaked from a long sound sleep.»

«But did you remember that you had died?»

«I remembered that I was very ill, in agony, and that is all.»

«And what do you remember of the other world?»

«Nothing. There is nothing. A black hole, an empty space in my life... Nothing.»

«So, according to you, there is no Limbo, no Purgatory, no Hell?»

«Who says there isn't? Of course there are. But I do not remember them.»

«But are you sure that you were dead?»

The people of Nain lose their temper: «Was he dead? What more do you want? When we put him into the coffin, he was about to smell. In any case, with all those balms and bandages even a giant would die!»

«But do you not remember that you were dead?»

«I have told that I don't» the young man is losing his patience and he adds: «But what are you getting at with all these questions? That the whole village was pretending that I was dead, including my mother and my fiancée, who was dying with grief in her bed, including myself, all bandaged up and embalmed, while it was not true? What are you saying? That in Nain we were all children or idiots in a jesting mood? My mother's hair turned white in a few hours. My fiancée had to be treated because sorrow and joy had almost driven her mad. And you doubt it? And why should we have done all that?»

«Why? That's true! Why should we have done it?» exclaim those of Nain.

Jesus does not speak. He toys with the tablecloth as if He were absent. The

Pharisees do not know what to say... But Jesus begins to speak all of a sudden, when the conversation on the subject seemed to have come to an end, and He says: «I will tell you why. They (and He points at the Pharisees and scribes) want to prove that your resurrection from the dead was a cleverly contrived game to increase My reputation with the crowds. I, the inventor, you the accomplices to deceive God and our neighbour. No. I leave fraud to worthless people. I do not need witchcraft, or tricks or accomplices to be what I am. Why do you want to deny God the power of giving a soul back to a body? If He creates a soul and gives it when the body is being formed, will He not be able to give it back to the body, when the soul, being restored to the body through the prayer of His Messiah, is an incentive for many people to come to the Truth? Can you deny God the power of miracle? Why do you want to deny it?»

«Are You God?»

«I am Who I am. My miracles and My doctrine testify Who I am.»

«But why does he not remember while the spirits evoked can tell what the next world is?»

«Because this soul speaks the truth, sanctified as it is by the penance of a first death, instead *what is spoken by the lips of necromancers is not the truth.*»

«But Samuel...»

«Samuel *came by the order of God*, not of the sorceress, to bring to the traitor of the Law the verdict of the Lord, *Who is not to be derided in His commandments.*»

«Then why do Your disciples do it?» The arrogant voice of a Pharisee, who stung to the quick raises his voice, draws the attention of the apostles, who are in the opposite room, separated by a corridor a little more than a yard wide, but not isolated by doors or heavy curtains. When they hear themselves being referred to, they stand up and come noiselessly into the corridor to listen.

«In what do they do it? Speak frankly, and if your accusation is true, I will warn them not to do anything against the Law.»

«I know in what they do it, and many others know as well. But since You raise people from the dead and You say that You are more than a prophet, find out for Yourself. We shall certainly not tell You. In any case, You have eyes to see also many other things which Your apostles have done, when they are not to be done,

or they did not do, when they are to be done. And You do not mind.»

«Tell Me some of them.»

«Why do Your disciples infringe the traditions of our ancestors? We saw them today. Also today! Not more than an hour ago! They went into the dining-room to eat without purifying their hands beforehand!»

If the Pharisees had said: «and they slaughtered citizens beforehand» they would not have spoken in such a horrified manner.

«You have watched them, of course. There are so many things to be seen. Good and beautiful things which make us bless the Lord for creating or permitting such things and for giving us our lives so that we may see them. And yet you do not watch them. And many others do as you do. But you waste your time and your peace running after things which are not good.

You look like jackals, or better still, like hyenas running in the trail of a stench, neglecting the waves of perfumes brought by the wind from gardens full of aromatic herbs. Hyenas do not love lilies and roses, jasmines and camphor, cinnamon and cloves. They are unpleasant smells to them. But the stench of a decomposing corpse in the bottom of a ravine, or on a cart road, or buried under bramble where a murderer threw it, or washed ashore by stormy waves, swollen, violaceous, burst, horrible, oh! that is a delightful smell for hyenas! And as the evening wind condenses and carries all the smells which the sun has distilled from the things it has warmed, they sniff at it to smell that vague inviting scent, and once they discover it and find where it comes from, they run away, with their snouts in the air, showing their uncovered teeth in their quivering jaws, like a hysterical laugh, to go where there is putrefaction. And be it the corpse of a man or a quadruped, or a snake killed by a peasant, or a beech-marten killed by a housewife, or be it a poor mouse, oh! they relish it! And they sink their fangs into the revolting stench, they feast and lick their lips...

But it is a matter of no interest, if some men improve in holiness day by day! But if one only does wrong, or more omit not a divine commandment, but a human practice – *you may call it tradition, precept, as you wish, but it is always a human thing* – then it is noticed. And one runs after even a suspicion... to rejoice, if the suspicion is true.

You who have come here not out of love, or faith or honesty, but for a wicked purpose, tell Me: *why do you infringe the commandment of God, for the sake of*

your tradition? Are you going to tell Me that a tradition is more than a Commandment? And yet God said: "Honour your father and your mother, anyone who curses father or mother must die"! You instead say: "Anyone who says to his father and mother: what you should have from me is corban (1) is no longer obliged to give it to his father and mother." *So with your tradition you have cancelled the commandment of God.*

Hypocrites! Isaiah rightly said of you when he prophesied: "This people honours Me only with lip-service while its heart is far from Me, therefore they honour Me in vain as they teach human doctrine and commandments."

And while you neglect the precepts of God, you keep the traditions of men, the ablutions of amphorae and chalices, of dishes and hands and other such things. While you justify the ingratitude and avarice of a son, by offering him the excuse of a sacrifice so that he may not give a piece of bread to those who gave birth to him and need his help and whom it is his duty to honour, because they are his parents, you are scandalised because one does not wash one's hands. You alter and infringe the word of God in order to obey words invented by you and imposed by you as precepts. You therefore proclaim yourselves more just than God. You arrogate to yourselves the rights of legislators, whereas God alone is the Legislator of His people. You...» and He would continue, but the hostile group goes out, in the hail of accusations, bumping into the apostles and those who were in the house, guests or women helping the landlady, and who had gathered in the corridor, attracted by Jesus' thundering voice.

Jesus, Who had stood up, sits down again, beckoning to all those present to enter where He is, and He says to them: «Listen to Me and understand the truth. There is nothing outside man which going into his mouth can make him unclean. *It is what comes out of the mouth that makes him unclean.* Let those who have ears hear and use their reason to understand and their will to act. And now let us go. People of Nain, persevere in good and may My peace be always with you.»

He stands up, He greets the landlord and landlady in particular and He sets out along the corridor. But He sees the friendly women, who are enraptured looking at Him and He goes towards them saying: «Peace to you as well. May Heaven reward you for assisting Me with such love that I did not regret My Mother's table. I perceived your motherly love in every crumb of bread, in every sauce and bit of roast, in the sweet honey and in the cool scented wine. Love Me always thus, O good women of Nain. But do not work so hard for Me the next time. A piece of bread and a handful of olives, dressed with your motherly

smiles and your honest good looks, are quite enough for Me. Be happy in your homes because the gratitude of the Persecuted One is upon you and He is leaving comforted by your love.»

The women, weeping in their happiness, are all on their knees, and in passing by He lightly touches their white or dark-haired heads, one by one, blessing them. He then goes out and sets out again...

The early shades of evening hide the pallor of Jesus, Who is embittered by too many things...

(1) Corban: offering to God, especially one made in fulfillment of a vow.

300. In the Sheepfold at Endor.

13th October 1945.

Jesus goes back to Endor only. He stops at the first house of the village, which is a sheepfold rather than a house. But just because it is such, with low closed stables full of hay, it can shelter the thirteen pilgrims. The landlord, a coarse but good man, hastens to bring a lamp and a small pail of frothy milk, with some small loaves of very dark bread. He then withdraws blessed by Jesus Who remains with only the Twelve.

Jesus offers and hands out the bread, and as they lack bowls or cups, each of them dips his bread into the little pail and drinks out of it, when thirsty. Jesus drinks only a little milk. He is grave and silent... So much so, that after the meal, when they have satisfied their appetite, which is always very good, they at last become aware of His quietness.

Andrew is the first to ask: «What is the matter with You, Master? You look sad or tired to me...»

«I do not deny that I am.»

«Why? Because of those Pharisees? You should be accustomed to them by now... I have almost got accustomed myself! And You know how I used to react to them earlier. They always sing the same song!... Snakes can but hiss, in fact,

and none of them will ever be able to imitate the singing of a nightingale. One ends up by not paying attention to them» says Peter, both earnestly and to cheer up Jesus.

«And that is how one loses one's control and falls into their coils. I ask you to never get accustomed to the voice of Evil as if it were harmless.»

«Oh! Well! If that is the only reason why You are sad, You are wrong. You can see how the world loves You» says Matthew.

«But is that the only reason why You are so sad? Tell me, my good Master. Or have they told You lies, or made slanderous insinuations or insinuated suspicion, or I do not know what, about us who love You?» asks the Iscariot solicitously and kindly, embracing with one arm Jesus, Who is sitting beside him on the hay.

Jesus turns towards Judas. His eyes flash like phosphorus in the flickering light of the lamp laid on the ground in the middle of the circle of the apostles sitting on the hay. Jesus stares at Judas of Kerioth and asks him: «And do you know Me to be so silly as to accept as true anybody's insinuations, to the point of being upset by them? It is real facts, Judas of Simon, which upset Me» and His eyes do not stop for one moment piercing, like a probe, the brown eyes of Judas.

«Which real facts are upsetting You, then?» insists the Iscariot in a tone of confidence.

«The ones I see in the depths of hearts and on dethroned foreheads.» Jesus lays stress upon the word.

Everybody becomes excited: «Dethroned? Why? What do You mean?»

«A king is dethroned when he is unworthy of remaining on the throne, and the first thing they tear off him is the crown, which is on his forehead, the most noble part of man, the only animal with his forehead erect towards the sky, as he is animal with regard to matter, but supernatural as a being gifted with a soul. But it is not necessary to be king on an earthly throne to be dethroned... *Every man is king because of his soul, and his throne is in Heaven. But when a man prostitutes his soul and becomes a brute and demon, he then dethrones himself.* The world is full of dethroned foreheads which are no longer erect towards Heaven, but are stooped towards the Abyss, weighed down by the word which Satan has carved on them. Do you want to know it? It is the one I read on foreheads. There is written: “Sold!” And that you may have no doubt as to who the buyer is, I tell you that it is Satan, by himself or through his servants in the

world.»

«I have understood! Those Pharisees, for instance, are the servants of a servant who is greater than they are and who is Satan's servant» says Peter earnestly.

Jesus does not reply.

«But... Do You know, Master, that those Pharisees, after hearing Your words, were scandalised when they went away? They said so, when they bumped into me while going out... You were very resolute» remarks Bartholomew.

And Jesus replies: «And very truthful. *It is not My fault, but theirs, if certain things must be said. And it was charitable of Me to say them.* Any plant which was not planted by My Heavenly Father is to be uprooted. And the useless moorland of parasitic, suffocating thorny herbs, which destroy the seed of the holy Truth, was not planted by Him. *It is charitable to uproot traditions and precepts which suffocate the Decalogue*, misinterpreting it, and making it inert and impossible to abide by. *It is charitable to do so for the sake of honest souls.* As far as those insolent obstinate persons are concerned, who are deaf to every advice and action of Love, leave them alone and let them be followed by those whose souls and inclinations are like theirs. They are blind men leading blind men. If one blind man leads another, both can but fall into a pit. Let them feed on their own uncleanness, which they call “cleanliness.” It cannot contaminate them any further, because it lies on the matrix from which it originates.»

«What You are saying now is connected with what You said in Daniel's house, is it not? That it is not what goes into the mouth of man that makes him unclean, but what comes out of it» asks Simon the Zealot gravely.

«Yes» replies Jesus briefly.

After a moment's silence, as Jesus' gravity freezes even the most exuberant characters, Peter asks: «Master, I, and I am not the only one, have not understood the parable very well. Please explain it to us. How is it that what goes in does not make unclean, and what comes out does? If I take a clean amphora and I pour dirty water into it, I will dirty it. So what goes into the amphora makes it unclean. But if from an amphora full of clean water I pour some of it on to the ground, I will not make the amphora unclean, because clean water comes out of it. So?»

And Jesus says: «We are not amphorae, Simon. We are not amphorae, My friends. *And not everything is clean in man!* Do even you not understand?»

Consider the case with which the Pharisees charged you. They stated that you were unclean because you were taking food to your mouths with dusty, sweaty hands, that is, with unclean hands. But where did that food go? From your mouths into your stomachs, from your stomachs into your intestines and from your intestines into the sewer. Can it thus make your whole body unclean, and what is contained in your body, if it only goes through the passage destined to fulfill the task of nourishing the flesh, and the flesh only, and then ending in a sewer, as it is right it should? That is not what makes man unclean. *What makes man unclean is what is entirely and exclusively his own, procreated and brought forth by his ego.* That is, what he has in his heart, and from his heart rises to his lips and to his head, corrupting his thoughts and words and making him wholly unclean. From the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, blasphemy. From the heart come avarice, lust, pride, envy, wrath, immoderate desires and sinful idleness. From the heart come incentives to all actions. And if the heart is wicked, they will be as wicked as the heart. All actions: from idolatry to insincere grumbling... All these wicked things, which from inside come outside, make man unclean, not eating without washing one's hands. The science of God is not a base thing, mud upon which any foot can tread. It is something sublime, which lives among stars, from which it descends with rays of light to perfect the just. Do not, at least you, tear it from Heaven to disgrace it in mud... Go and rest now. I am going out to pray.»

301. From Endor to Magdala.

14th October 1945.

Rain, rain, rain... The apostles who are not very happy to walk in the rain, suggest to Jesus that it might be better to take shelter at Nazareth, which is not far... and Peter says: «And then I could leave with the boy...»

Jesus' «no» is so resolute that no one dare insist. Jesus is walking ahead of them, all alone... The others are following Him, in two sullen groups.

But Peter cannot resist any longer and he approaches Jesus. «Master, can I stay with You?» he asks in a rather mortified tone.

«You are always dear to Me, Simon. Come.»

Peter cheers up. He trots along beside Jesus, Who goes a long way with His strides, without any effort. After a little while he says: «Master... it would have been lovely to have the boy for the feast...»

Jesus does not reply.

«Master, why do You not make me happy?»

«Simon, you are running the risk of having the boy taken away from you.»

«No! Lord! Why?» Peter is frightened by the threat and looks desolate.

«Because I do not want you to be tied to anything. I told you when I gave you Marjiam. You, instead, are getting stranded in your affection.»

«It is not a sin to love. And to love Marjiam. You love him, too...»

«But My love does not prevent Me from devoting Myself entirely to My mission. Do you not remember My words on human affections and My advice, which was as clear as an order, concerning those who want to put their hands to the plough? Are you getting tired, Simon of Jonah, of being My disciple heroically?»

Peter's voice is broken by sobs when he replies: «No, Lord. I remember everything and I am not tired. But I am under the impression that it is the other way round... You are tired of me, of poor Simon who left everything to follow You...»

«You mean: who found everything in following Me.»

«No... Yes... Master... I am a poor man...»

«I know. And that is exactly why I am working on you. To make of the poor man a man, a saint, My Apostle, My Stone. I am hard to make you hard. I do not want you to be as soft as this mud. I want you to be a perfectly squared block: the foundation Stone. Do you not understand that that is love? Do you not remember the Wise Man? He says that he who loves is severe. But understand Me! At least you! Can you not see how I am overwhelmed and desolate because of so much misunderstanding, because of too much feigning, of so much indifference, and of even more disappointments?»

«Is that... is that how You feel, Master? Oh! Divine Mercy! And I never realised it! What a blockhead I am!... But for how long?... By whom? Tell me...»

«It is of no avail. You would not be able to do anything. I can do nothing Myself...»

«Could I not do anything to relieve You?»

«I told you: you should understand that My sternness is love and see love in every act of Mine concerning you.»

«Yes, of course. I will not speak any more. My dear Master! I will say no more. Forgive this blockhead. Give me a sign that You really forgive me...»

«A sign! My “yes” should really be enough for you. But I will give you it. Listen: I cannot go to Nazareth because, besides Marjiam, John of Endor and Syntyche are there. And that is not to be known.»

«Not even to us? Why?... Ah! Master?! Are You afraid of any of us?»

«Prudence teaches that when something is to be kept secret, two people who are aware of it are too many. Even a careless word can be detrimental. And men are not all and always thoughtful.»

«Really... I am not thoughtful either. But when I want, I can be silent. And I will! I will indeed! I will no longer be Simon of Jonah, if I do not hold my tongue. Thank You, Master, for Your esteem. It is indeed a great sign of love... So we are now going to Tarichea?»

«Yes. Then we will go to Magdala by boat. I must collect the gold of the jewels...»

«You can now see that I am able to hold my tongue! I never said anything to Judas, You know?»

Jesus makes no comment on the interruption. He goes on: «Once I have received the gold, I will leave you all free until the day after the Dedication. If I should want any of you, I will call you to Nazareth. The apostles from Judaea, with the exception of Simon Zealot, will take Lazarus' sisters and their handmaids, and Eliza of Bethzur, to their house in Bethany. They will then go to their homes for the Dedication. It will be quite all right if they come back by the end of Shebat, when we shall start going round again. You are the only one to know, is that right, Simon Peter?»

«Yes, I am the only one. But... You will have to tell the others...»

«I will tell them at the right moment. Go now to your companions and be sure of

My love.»

Peter obeys and is happy and Jesus becomes absorbed in thought once again.

The waves are breaking against the little beach of Magdala, when the two boats land there in a late November afternoon. They are not big waves, but they are annoying for those landing, as their clothes get wet. But the prospect of being sheltered at once in the house of Mary of Magdala makes them put up with the undesired bath without any grumbling.

«Put the boats away and then join us» says Jesus to the servants. And He sets out at once along the shore because they landed in a cove a little outside the town, where there are other boats of fishermen from Magdala.

«Judas of Simon and Thomas, come here with Me» says Jesus calling them. They run up to Him. «I have decided to entrust you with a confidential task, and a pleasant one at the same time. This is the task: you will take Lazarus' sisters to Bethany. And Eliza will go with them. I think highly enough of you to entrust the women disciples to you. And you will take a letter of Mine to Lazarus. Then, when you have fulfilled your task, you will go home for the Dedication... Do not interrupt Me, Judas. We shall all celebrate the Dedication at home this year. It is too rainy a winter to travel about. You can see that also sick people are thinning out. So we will take advantage of the situation and make our families happy. I will wait for you at Capernaum by the end of Shebat.»

«But are You staying at Capernaum?» asks Thomas.

«I am not yet sure where I will be staying. Here or there it is the same to Me, providing My Mother is with Me.»

«I would have preferred to celebrate the Dedication with You» says the Iscariot.

«I believe you. But if you love Me, please obey. All the more because your obedience will give you the possibility of helping the disciples, who are once again spread out everywhere. You must help Me with them. In a family it is the elder sons who help the parents to bring up the younger ones. You are the elder brothers of the disciples, and they the younger ones, and you ought to be happy that I rely on you. It proves that I am satisfied with your recent work.»

Thomas simply says: «It's too kind of You, Master. But, as far as I am concerned, I will endeavour to do even better, now. But I am sorry to leave

You... But time flies... And my old father will be happy to have me for the feast... and my sisters too... My twin sister above all!... She must have had, or is about to have a baby... The first nephew... If it is a boy, and is born when I am there, what name shall I give him?»

«Joseph.»

«And if it is a girl?»

«Mary. There are no sweeter names.»

But Judas, proud of the appointment, is already strutting about and making plans... He has completely forgotten that he will be leaving Jesus and that shortly before, about the time of the Tabernacles, if I remember rightly, he had protested, like an unbroken horse, against Jesus' order to part from Him for a little while. He forgets also how at the time he suspected that it was Jesus' desire to send him away. He has forgotten everything and he is happy to be considered one who may be entrusted with delicate tasks. He promises: «I will bring You much money for the poor» and he takes out his purse and says: «Here, take this. It is all we have. I have nothing else. Give me provisions for our journey from Bethany home.»

«But we are not leaving this evening» objects Thomas.

«It does not matter. No money is required in Mary's house, so... I am happy that I do not have to handle any more... When I come back I will bring Your Mother some flower seeds. I will get them from my mother. And I want to bring a present for Marjiam...» He is elated. Jesus looks at him...

They are now in the house of Mary of Magdala. They make themselves known and go in. The women run joyfully to meet the Master, Who has come to take shelter in their home...

And after supper, when the tired apostles have withdrawn, Jesus, sitting in the centre of a hall, in the circle of the women disciples, informs them of His desire that they should leave as soon as possible. Unlike the apostles, not one of them protests. They bow their heads in assent and then go out to pack their luggage. But Jesus calls back the Magdalene, who is already on the threshold.

«Well, Mary? Why did you whisper to Me, when I arrived: “I must speak to You privately”?»

«Master, I sold the precious stones. At Tiberias. Marcella sold them with the

assistance of Isaac. I have the money in my room. I did not want Judas to see...» and she blushes deeply.

Jesus stares at her but does not say anything.

The Magdalene goes out and comes back with a heavy purse which she hands to Jesus: «Here it is» she says. «They paid a very good price for them.»

«Thank you, Mary.»

«Thank You, Rabboni, for asking this favour of me. Have You anything else to ask me?...»

«No, Mary. And have you anything else to tell Me?»

«No, my Lord. Bless me, Master.»

«Yes, I bless you... Mary... are you happy to go back to Lazarus? Supposing I were no longer in Palestine, would you go back home willingly?»

«Yes, my Lord. But...»

«Go on, Mary. Do not be afraid to tell me what you think.»

«I would have gone back more willingly, if Simon the Zealot had been in the place of Judas of Kerioth, because he is a great friend of our family.»

«I need him for an important mission.»

«Your brothers, then or John, whose heart is as innocent as a dove. Anyone of them, except him. My Lord, do not look at me so severely... Who has fed on lust, perceives it when it is near... I am not afraid of it. I can hold at bay someone who is much more than Judas. And I am terrified at not being forgiven, and it is my ego, and it is Satan who wanders round me, and it is the world... But if Mary of Theophilus is not afraid of anybody, Mary of Jesus is disgusted at the vice which had subdued her, and she... Lord... The man who craves for sensuality disgusts me...»

«You are not alone on the journey, Mary. *And I am sure that while he is with you he will not come back...* Remember that I must send Syntyche and John to Antioch and who is not prudent must not know anything about it...»

«That is true. So I will go... Master, when shall we meet again?»

«I do not know, Mary. Perhaps only at Passover. Go in peace, now. I will bless

you this evening and every evening, together with your sister and good Lazarus.»

Mary bends to kiss Jesus' feet leaving Him alone in the silent room.

302. Jesus at Nazareth for the Dedication.

15th October 1945.

It is a dark, cold, windy December evening. Apart from the leaves torn off the trees which still have a few, and which rustle blown by a whistling wind, there is no other noise in the streets of Nazareth, which is as dark as a dead city. No light or noise filters through the bolted doors. It is really a horrible evening.

And yet, the Lamb of God is walking through the deserted streets of Nazareth, on His way home. A tall dark shadow in a dark tunic, He almost vanishes in the dark, starless night and His step is just a rustling noise when He treads on a heap of dry leaves, which the wind has laid on the ground, after whirling them around, and is ready to pick up again and blow elsewhere.

He arrives near the house of Mary Clopas. He stands for a moment undecided as to whether He should enter the garden and knock at the kitchen door or proceed... He proceeds without stopping. He is now in the little street where is His house. One can already see the tormented olive-trees swaying on the hillock against which the house is placed, dark shadows swaying against the black sky. He quickens His step and arrives at the door. He listens carefully. It is so easy to hear what is happening in that little house! If one presses against the door post, there are only a few inches of wood between the outside listener and the speaker within... And yet no voice is heard.

«It is late» He says with a sigh. «I will wait until dawn before knocking.»

But when He is about to go away, He hears the rhythmical noise of the loom. He smiles and says: «She is up and She is weaving. It is certainly She... That is Mother's rhythm.» I cannot see His face but I am sure that He is smiling because I can perceive a smile in His voice which was previously sad and now is cheerful.

He knocks. The noise stops for a moment, then there is the sound of a chair being pushed back, and finally the silvery voice asks: «Who is it?»

«It is I, Mother!»

«Son!» A loving cry of joy, even if uttered in a low voice. The noise of the bolt being withdrawn is heard, and the door opens letting out a golden flash into the dark night. Mary falls into Jesus' arms, on the door step, as if He could wait no longer to receive Her and She to throw Herself onto His heart.

«Son! My Son!» Kisses and the sweet words «Mother – Son»... They go in and the door is closed silently.

Mary explains in a low voice: «They are all sleeping. I was awake... Since Judas and James came back saying that You were following them, I have been staying up until late. Are You cold, Jesus? Of course You are, You are frozen. Come. I kept the fire lit. I will put a faggot on it and You will warm Yourself.» And She leads Him by the hand as if He were still the Child Jesus...

The flame shines brightly and crackles in the stirred hearth. Mary looks at Jesus Who holds His hands out to warm them. «How pale You are! You were not like that when we parted... You are becoming thinner and paler, My Child. Once Your complexion was like milk and roses, but now You look like old ivory. What has happened to You recently, Son? Still the Pharisees?»

«Yes... and other worries. But now I am happy, here with You, and I will be all right at once. This year we are celebrating the Dedication here, Mother! I will reach the perfect age here beside You. Are You glad?»

«Yes. But Your perfect age, My darling, is still remote... You are young, and with regard to Me, You are always My little Child. Here, the milk is warm. Will You drink it here or in the other room?»

«In the other room, Mother. I am warm now. I will drink it while You cover Your loom.»

They go back into the little room and Jesus sits on the chest near the table and drinks His milk. Mary looks at Him and smiles. She smiles even more when She takes Jesus' bag and puts it on a shelf. She smiles so much that Jesus asks: «What are You thinking of?»

«I was thinking that You have come just on the anniversary of our departure to Bethlehem... Also then there were bags and cases open or full of clothes and

particularly of swaddling-clothes... for a Little One, Who might be born, I used to say to Joseph; Who was to be born, I said to Myself, in Bethlehem of Judah... I had hidden them in the bottom, because Joseph was afraid of that... He did not yet know that the birth of the Son of God would not be subject, both for Himself and for His Mother, to the common miseries of childbirth. He did not know... and he was afraid of being away from Nazareth with Me in that state. I was sure that I would be a Mother there... You exulted too much in My womb for the joy of Your oncoming Birthday, and of the Birthday of Redemption, so I could not be deceived. Angels whirled round the Lady Who carried You, My God... It was no longer the sublime Archangel, or My most sweet guardian Angel, as in the first months. Now choirs of angels darted from the Heaven of My God to My little Heaven: My womb, where You were... And I heard them sing and exchange brilliant words... words of anxiety to see You, God Incarnate... I heard them when, driven by love, they fled from Paradise to come and worship You, Love of the Father, concealed in My womb. And I endeavoured to learn their words... their songs... their ardour... But no human creature can repeat or have Heavenly things...»

Jesus listens to Her, He is sitting, She is standing near the table, dreaming as much as He is blissful... with one hand resting on the dark wood and the other pressed against Her heart... And Jesus lays His long darker hand on the little white, gentle, holy hand and presses it in His own... And when She becomes silent, almost regretting that She had not been able to learn the words, songs and ardour of the angels, Jesus says: «All the words of the angels, all their songs, all their ardour, could not have made Me happy on the earth, if I had not had Yours, Mother! You said and gave Me what they could not give Me. You did not learn from them, but they learned from You... Come here, Mother, beside Me and tell Me more... Not of the past... but of the present. What were You doing?»

«I was working...»

«I know. But at what? I am certain that You were overworking Yourself for Me. Let Me see...» Mary becomes redder than the cloth on the loom as Jesus gets up to look at it. «Purple? Who gave it to You?»

«Judas of Kerioth. I think that he got the fishermen of Sidon to give it to him. He wants Me to make a king's robe for You. Of course, I will make the robe for You. But You do not need purple to be a king.»

«Judas is more stubborn than a mule» is the only comment on the purple gift...

He then asks His Mother: «And can You make a full robe with what he gave You?»

«Oh! no, Son! It can be used as a border of a tunic and mantle. But not more than that.»

«Very well. I understand why You are weaving it in low strips. Well... Mother: I like the idea. Keep those strips aside for Me and one day I will tell You to use them for a beautiful tunic. But there is plenty time. Do not tire Yourself.»

«I work when I am at Nazareth...»

«That is true... And what have the others done during this time?»

«They have improved their knowledge.»

«That is: You have improved their knowledge. What do You think of them?»

«Oh! They are very good. If I except You, I never had more diligent and kind pupils. I have also endeavoured to make John a little stronger. He is very ill. He will not live long...»

«I know. But it is a good thing for him. In any case, he wishes that himself. He spontaneously understood the value of suffering and of death. And what about Syntyche?»

«It is a pity to have to send her away. She is worth one hundred disciples because of her holiness and her capacity for understanding the supernatural.»

«I realise that. But I must do it.»

«What You do, Son, is always well done.»

«And the boy?»

«He is learning too. But he is very sad these days... He remembers the misfortune of a year ago... Oh! there is not much mirth here!... John and Syntyche sigh thinking of their departure from here, the boy weeps thinking of his dead mother...»

«And what about You?»

«I... You know, Son. There is no sunshine when You are away. There would not be even if the world did love You. But at least there would be a serene sky... Instead...»

«There is weeping. Poor Mother!... Have they asked You questions about John and Syntyche?»

«And who would ask Me? Mary of Alphaeus knows and is silent. Alphaeus of Sarah has already seen John and is not curious. He calls him “the disciple”.»

«And the others?»

«With the exception of Mary and Alphaeus, no one comes to see Me. Only a woman occasionally for some work or advice. But the men of Nazareth no longer cross My threshold.»

«Not even Joseph and Simon?»

«... No... Simon sends Me oil, flour, olives, firewood, eggs... as if he wanted to be forgiven for not understanding You, and he wanted to speak through gifts. But he gives them to Mary, his mother, and he does not come here. In any case, if anyone came, they would only see Me, because Syntyche and John withdraw if someone knocks...»

«A very sad life.»

«Yes. And the boy suffers very much, so much so that Mary of Alphaeus now takes him with her when she does My shopping. But now we shall no longer be sad, My Jesus, because You are here!»

«I am here... Now let us go to bed. Bless Me, Mother, as You used to do when I was a little boy.»

«Bless Me, Son. I am Your disciple.» They kiss each other... They light another little lamp and go out to go and rest.

303. Jesus with John of Endor and Syntyche at Nazareth.

16th October 1945.

«Master! Master! Master!» The three shouts of John of Endor, who coming out of his little room to go to the fountain and wash himself, meets Jesus coming from it, awake Marjiam, who runs out of Mary's room wearing only a short sleeveless tunic, still barefooted, with eyes and mouth wide open to see and

shout: «Jesus is here!» and runs at full speed to climb up to Jesus' arms. The shouts awaken also Syntyche who sleeps in Joseph's old workshop, and who comes out after a few moments, already dressed but with her dark plaits only half done and hanging loose on her shoulders.

Jesus, with the boy still in His arms, greets John and Syntyche and urges them to go back into the house because the north wind is very strong. And He enters first, carrying the half naked Marjiam, whose teeth are chattering notwithstanding his enthusiasm. He puts the boy near the fire, which is already lit, and where Mary is busy warming some milk and the boy's clothes, so that he may not catch a cold.

The other two do not speak, but they look like the personification of ecstatic joy. Jesus, Who is sitting with the boy in His lap while the Blessed Virgin wraps him up quickly in the warmed garments, looks up and smiling says to them: «I did promise you that I would come. And Simon Zealot will be coming today or tomorrow, too. I sent him on an errand. But he will soon be here and we will be together for many days.»

Marjiam is soon dressed and his little cheeks, which had turned pale with the cold, colour once again. Jesus puts him down and goes into the next room followed by everybody. Mary goes in last holding the boy by the hand. And She reproaches him kindly: «What should I do to you, now? You disobeyed. I said to you: “Stay in bed until I come back”, instead you came before...»

«John's shouts awoke me...» replies Marjiam apologetically.

«That is exactly when you should have obeyed. To stay in bed while one sleeps is no obedience and there is no merit in doing so. You should have been able to do it when there was merit, because it exacted your will power. I would have brought Jesus to you. And you would have had Him all to yourself, without running the risk of catching a cold.»

«I did not know that it was so cold.»

«But I did. It grieves Me to see you disobey.»

«No, Mother. It grieves me more to see You thus... If it had not been for Jesus I would not have got up even if You had forgotten Me in bed without any food, my beautiful Mother!... Give me a kiss, Mummy. You know that I am a poor boy!...»

Mary takes him in Her arms and kisses him, stopping thus the tears running down his cheeks and making him smile once again with the promise: «I will never, never, never again disobey You!»

Jesus in the meantime is speaking to the two disciples. He inquires about their progress in Wisdom, and as they state that everything becomes clear to them through Mary's words, He says: «I know. The supernaturally bright Wisdom of God becomes clear light also for the most hard-hearted people, when spoken by Her. But you are not hard-hearted, and thus you fully benefit from Her teaching.»

«You are here now, Son. The teacher becomes a pupil once again.»

«Oh! no! You will continue to be the teacher. I will listen to You as they do. I am only “the Son” these next days. Nothing else. You will be the Mother and Teacher of Christians. You are so even now: I am Your First-Born and first pupil, and they, and Simon when he comes, are the others... See, Mother? The world is here. The world of the future in the little pure Israelite who will not even be aware of becoming the “Christian”; the world, the old world of Israel in the Zealot; mankind in John, the Gentiles in Syntyche. And they all come to You, the Holy Mother Who gives the milk of Wisdom and Life to the world and to centuries. How many mouths have desired to suckle at Your breast! And how many will do so in future! Patriarchs and Prophets longed for You, because the Nourishment of man was to come from Your fertile womb. And “My followers” will seek You to be forgiven, taught, defended, loved, like as many Marjiam. And blessed are those who will do so! *Because it will not be possible to persevere in Christ, unless grace is fortified by Your help, Mother full of Grace.*»

Mary looks like a rose in Her dark dress, as She blushes so much at Her Son's praise. A splendid rose in a very humble dress, of coarse dark brown wool...

They knock and Mary of Alphaeus, James and Judas come in together, the latter laden with pitchers of water and faggots. Their joy to meet again is reciprocal. And it increases when they learn that the Zealot will be coming soon. That Alphaeus' sons are fond of him is obvious, even without the words spoken by Judas in reply to his mother's remark commenting their joy: «Mother, just in this house and one very sad evening for us, he showed us the love of a father and still has that love for us. We cannot forget it. He is for us “the father”. We are for him “his sons”. Which sons do not rejoice in seeing a good father?»

Mary of Alphaeus is pensive and sighs... Then, being very practical even in her grief, she asks: «And where will you let him sleep? You have no room. Send him to my house.»

«No, Mary. He will live under My roof. But it is soon settled. Syntyche will sleep with My Mother, I with Marjiam, Simon in the workshop. Nay, we had better prepare at once. Let us go.»

And the men go out into the kitchen garden, while the two Maries go to do their work in the kitchen.

304. Jesus' Lesson to Marjiam.

17th October 1945.

Jesus goes out of the house, holding the boy by the hand. They do not go to the centre of Nazareth, on the contrary they leave the village going along the same road which Jesus took the first time He left His house for His public life. When they arrive at the first olive-groves, they leave the main road and follow little paths among trees, in search of the warm sun after the stormy days.

Jesus urges Marjiam to run and jump, but the boy replies: «I prefer to stay with You. I am big, now, and I am a disciple.»

Jesus smiles at the... authoritative profession of age and dignity. It is true that it is a little adult who is walking beside Him. No one would say that he is more than ten years old. But no one can deny that he is a disciple, and least of all Jesus, Who just says: «But you will be bored being silent while I pray. I brought you here so that you may enjoy yourself.»

«I cannot enjoy myself these days... But it is a great relief to me to be beside You... I have longed for You so much these days... because... because...» The boy tightens his trembling lips and speaks no more.

Jesus lays a hand on his head saying: «He who believes in My word must not be as sad as those who do not believe. I always speak the truth. Also when I assure you that *there is no separation between the souls of the just people who are in Abraham's bosom and the souls of the just people on the earth.* I am

Resurrection and Life, Marjiam. And I have brought the latter even before fulfilling My mission. You have always told Me that your parents were longing for the coming of the Messiah and they asked God to live long enough to see Him. So they believed in Me. *They died in that faith. Therefore they have already been saved by it, and have risen again and are alive through it.* Because My faith gives life by giving thirst for justice. Consider how many times they must have resisted temptations to be worthy of meeting the Saviour...»

«But they died without seeing You, Lord... And they died in that manner... I saw them, You know, when they extracted all the dead people of village from the earth... My mother, my father... my little brothers... What do I care if they said to me to comfort me: “Your relatives are not like these. They did not suffer”? Oh! They did not suffer! So, was it feathers and not rocks that fell on them? And was it air and not earth and water which suffocated them? And did they not suffer thinking of me, when they felt they were dying?...» The boy is shaken by grief. He gesticulates vivaciously standing in front of Jesus, and is almost aggressive...

But Jesus understands his grief, and his need to express it and lets him talk. Jesus is not one of those who says: «Be quiet. You are scandalising me» to those who rave in their grief.

The boy goes on: «And after? What happened after? You know what happened! If You had not come, I would have become a beast or I would have died in the wood like a snake. And I would not have gone to join my mother, father and brothers, because I hated Doras and... and I no longer loved God as I did before, when there was my mother who loved me and made me love my neighbour. I almost hated birds, as they filled their crops, had warm feathers and built their nests, whilst I was hungry, my clothes were torn and I was homeless... And I who love birds, would chase them away, as I was seized by wrath comparing myself with them, and then I would weep realising that I had been bad and had deserved Hell...»

«Ah! So you repented of being bad?»

«Yes, my Lord. But how could I be good? My old father was good. But he used to say: “It will soon be all over. I am old... But I was not old! How many years would I have had to wait before I could work and eat like a man and not like a stray dog? I would have become a thief, if You had not come.»

«You would not, because your mother was praying for you. You can see that I came and took you. That is the proof that God loved you and that your mother

was watching over you.»

The boy becomes silent and thoughtful. He seems to be seeking enlightenment from the ground upon which he is treading, walking beside Jesus on the short grass dried up by the north wind of the previous days. He looks up and asks: «But would it not have been a lovelier proof if He had not let my mother die?»

Jesus smiles at the human logic of his young mind. And He kindly but earnestly explains: «Now, Marjiam. I will make you understand the situation by means of a comparison. You told Me that you like little birds, did you not? Now listen. Were little birds created to fly or to be closed in cages?»

«To fly.»

«Good. And what do the mothers of the little birds do to nourish them?»

«They feed them.»

«Yes. But with what?»

«With seeds, flies, grubs, or crumbs of bread, or bits of fruit which they find flying about.»

«Very well. Now listen. If in springtime you should find a nest on the ground, with little ones in it and their mother on them, what would you do?»

«I would take it.»

«All of it? As it is? Including the mother?»

«All of it. Because it is too unpleasant to be little ones without a mother.»

«But in Deuteronomy it is written that one must take the little ones only, letting the mother free, as it is her mission to proliferate.»

«But if she is a good mother, she will not go away. She will fly to her little ones. That is what my mother would have done. She would not have given me to You either for good, because I am still a boy. Neither could she have come with me because my brothers were younger than I am. So she would not have let me go.»

«Very well. But listen: according to you, would you love that mother of the little birds and the little ones more if you kept the cage open so that she might come and go with suitable food, or if you kept her in prison as well?»

«Eh!... I would love her more by letting her come and go until the little ones

have grown up... and my love would be complete if I kept them and once they have grown up, I let the mother free, because birds were created to fly... Really... to be utterly good... once the little ones have grown up I should let them free as well, and let them fly away... It would be the best love I could have for them... And the most just... Of course! The most just because I would do nothing but allow what God wanted for birds to be accomplished...»

«Very clever of you, Marjiam! You have spoken as a wise man. You will be a great teacher of your Lord, and those who listen to you will believe you, because you will speak to them as a wise man!»

«Really, Jesus?» His little face, previously worried and sad, then absorbed in thought, reserved in the effort of judging what was best, settles down and brightens for the joy of the praise.

«Yes, really. Now look! You have judged thus, because you are a clever boy. Now consider how God will judge, since He is Perfection itself, with regard to souls and what is best for them. *Souls are like birds, enclosed in the cages of bodies.* The earth is the place where they are brought with their cages. But they yearn for the freedom of Heaven; for the Sun which is God; for Nourishment suitable to them, which is the contemplation of God. *No human love, not even the holy love of a mother for her children or of children for their mother, is so strong as to suffocate such yearning of souls to be rejoined to their Origin, which is God.* Likewise God, because of His perfect love for us, finds no reason so strong as to exceed His desire to be rejoined to the soul longing for Him. What happens then? Sometimes He loves it so much that He says to it: “Come! I will free you.” And He says so even if there are some children around a mother. He sees everything. He knows everything. *What He does, He does well.* When He frees a soul – the limited intelligence of men may not think so, but it is true – *when He frees a soul, He always does it for a greater welfare of the soul itself and of its relatives.* As I have already told you, He then adds to the ministry of the guardian angel the ministry of the soul which He has called to Himself, and which loves its relatives with a love free from human burdens, because it loves them in God. *When He frees a soul, He binds Himself to take its place in taking care of the survivors.* Has He not done that with you? Has He not made you, little child of Israel, My disciple, My future priest?»

«Yes, my Lord, He has.»

«Now consider this. Your mother will be freed by Me and will not need your

suffrages. But had she died after Redemption and were she in need of suffrages, you could pray for her as a priest. Just think: all you could have done was to spend some money to give an offering to a priest of the Temple so that he would make on her behalf a sacrifice of victims, such as lambs or doves or other fruits of the earth. That in case you had remained the little peasant Jabez near your mother. Instead, you, Marjiam, the priest of Christ, could offer directly for her the true Sacrifice of the perfect Victim, in Whose name all forgiveness is granted!»

«And will I no longer be able to do it?»

«Not for your father, mother and little brothers. But you will be able to do it for friends and disciples. Is that not beautiful?»

«Yes, Lord.»

«Well, then, let us go back home and be cheerful once again.»

«Yes... But I did not let You pray!... I am sorry...»

«But we did pray! We considered the truth, we contemplated God in His bounty... All that is prayer. And you did it as a true adult. Come on, now. Let us sing a psalm of praise for the joy which is within us.» And He begins to sing: «“My heart is stirred by a noble theme...”»

Marjiam joins his silvery voice to the bronze and golden voice of Jesus.

305. Simon Zealot at Nazareth.

18th October 1945.

It gets dark early in December, the lights are lit early and families gather in one room. That happens also in the little house in Nazareth, and while the two women work, one at the loom, the other doing needlework, Jesus and John of Endor, sitting near the table, are talking in low voices, and Marjiam is about to finish polishing two chests laid on the floor.

The boy is working vigorously when Jesus stands up and bending over the wood says: «That is enough now. It is smooth enough and tomorrow we will be able to

paint it. Put everything away now, because we will be working again tomorrow.» And while Marjiam goes out with his polishing tools – stiff spatulas on which rough fish skin is nailed to do the work of our sandpaper, and implements like knives, but certainly not steel, for the same purpose – Jesus lifts with His strong arms one of the chests and takes it into the workshop, where they must have been working because there are sawdust and wood-shavings near one of the benches, which has been placed in the centre of the room for the occasion. Marjiam has put his tools back in their rests and is now picking up the shavings to throw them on the fire, as he says, and would also like to sweep up the sawdust, but John of Endor prefers to do it himself.

Everything has been tidied up when Jesus comes back with the second chest, which He puts near the first one. The three of them are about to come out when they hear someone knock at the door and immediately afterwards the grave voice of the Zealot resounds in a deep salutation to Mary: «Hail, Mother of my Saviour, I bless Your kindness which allows me to live under Your roof.»

«Simon has arrived. We will now learn why he is late. Let us go...» says Jesus.

When they enter the little room where the apostle is with the women, Simon is taking a large bundle off his shoulders.

«Peace to you, Simon...»

«Oh! Blessed Master! I am late, am I not? But I have done everything and well...»

They kiss one another. Simon then continues his story: «I went to see the carpenter's widow. Your assistance arrived at the right moment. The old woman is very ill and expenses have thus gone up. The little carpenter does his best to make little items, and always remembers You. They all bless You. I then went to see Nara, Samira and Sirah. Their brother is more difficult than ever. But they are peaceful, holy as they are, and they eat their poor bread dressed with tears and forgiveness. They bless You for the assistance sent to them. But they ask You to pray that their harsh brother may turn. Old Rachel also blesses You for Your alms. Finally I went to Tiberias to shop. I hope I got the right things, The women can now look at them... But I was held in Tiberias by some people who thought I was Your forerunner. They sequestered me for three days... Oh! I may say that it was a golden prison! But it was still a prison... They wanted to know so many things... I told them the truth explaining that You had dismissed us all and that You had retired for the worst period of winter... When they were

convinced that it was true, also because they went to Simon of Jonah and Philip without finding You and without learning anything else, they let me go. Even the excuse of the bad weather was of no use, as the weather was lovely. That is why I am late.»

«It does not matter. We have plenty time to be together. I thank you for everything... Mother, look at the contents of the parcel with Syntyche and let Me know whether You think it is enough for what You know...» and while the women are opening the parcel, Jesus sits down and talks to Simon.

«And what have You done, Master?»

«I made two chests, to avoid being idle and because they will be useful. I went for walks, I enjoyed being at home...»

Simon stares at Him... But does not say anything.

The exclamations of Marjiam, who sees lengths of linen and woollen cloths, sandals, veils and belts come out of the parcel, make Jesus and His two companions turn round.

Mary says: «Everything is all right. We will begin to sew at once and everything will soon be ready.»

The boy asks: «Are You getting married, Jesus?»

Everybody laughs and Jesus asks: «What makes you think so?»

«All these things for a man and a woman and the two chests You made. They are for Your trousseau and for Your bride's. Will You let me make her acquaintance?»

«Do you really want to meet My bride?»

«Oh! Yes! She must be beautiful and good! What is her name!...»

«It is a secret for the time being. Because she has two names, like you, who were first Jabez and then Marjiam.»

«And can I not know them?»

«Not just now. You will know them one day.»

«Will You invite me to the wedding?»

«It will not be a feast for children. I will invite you to the wedding party. You

will be one of the guests and a witness. All right?»

«How long will it be? In a month's time?»

«Oh! much longer!»

«In that case why did You work so hurriedly as to get blisters on Your hands?»

«I got them because I no longer work with My hands. See, My dear child, how painful idleness is? Always. When one resumes working one suffers twice as much because one becomes too delicate. Now, if it hurts one's hands so much, how much will it hurt one's soul? See? This evening I had to ask you to help Me, because My hands were so sore that I could not hold the rasp, whereas only two years ago I could work for fourteen hours without feeling any pain. The same happens to those whose fervour and will become loose. One becomes flaccid and feeble and grows weary of everything very easily, as the poisons of spiritual diseases affect those who are weak. On the other hand, it is twice as difficult to do good actions, which previously, when one was always in practice, cost no effort. Oh! It never pays to be idle saying: "After this period of time I will resume working with fresh energy"! One would never succeed, or would succeed with the greatest difficulty.»

«But You have never been idle!»

«No. I have done other work. But you can see that the idleness of My hands has been detrimental to them..» And Jesus shows His hands which are red and blistered.

Marjiam kisses them saying: «My mother used to do that to me when I hurt myself, because love heals.»

«Yes, love heals many things... Well... Come, Simon. You will sleep in the carpenter's room. Come and I will show you where you can put your clothes and...» they go out and it all ends.

306. An Evening at Home in Nazareth.

19th October 1945.

The loom is idle because Mary and Syntyche are busy sewing the cloth brought by the Zealot. The material has been cut into pieces which have been folded and laid in an orderly pile on the table, shade by shade, and now and again the women take one piece and baste it on the table, so that the men have been pushed back towards the corner of the idle loom; they are close to the women but are not interested in their work.

The apostles James and Judas of Alphaeus are also there and are watching the busy women, without asking any questions, but not without curiosity, I think. The cousins speak of their brothers, and particularly of Simon, who has come with them as far as Jesus' door and then gone away «because his son is not well», says James, to mitigate the sad news and excuse his brother. But Judas is more severe and says: «That is why he should have come. But he also seems to have become dull-witted. Like all the Nazarenes, after all, if we except Alphaeus and the two disciples, about whose present whereabouts I wonder. It is clear that nothing else is good in Nazareth, and what was good has all been spat out, as if it tasted unpleasant to our town...»

«Do not say that» begs Jesus. «Do not poison your soul. It is no fault of theirs...»

«Whose fault is it, then?»

«Of many things... Do not be inquisitive. Not everybody in Nazareth is hostile. Children...»

«Because they are children.»

«Women...»

«Because they are women. But neither children nor women will assert Your Kingdom.»

«Why not, Judas? You are wrong. Today's children will be tomorrow's disciples and will propagate the Kingdom all over the world. And women... Why can they not do it?»

«You certainly cannot make apostles of women. At most they may be women disciples, who will assist disciples, as You said.»

«You will change your mind about many things in future, My dear brother. But I

will not even attempt to make you change it. I would clash with a mentality which comes to you as the result of centuries of wrong conceptions and preconceptions concerning women. I only ask you to observe and make a note of the differences which you see between disciples and women disciples and to watch how they respond to My teaching. You will see, beginning with your mother, who we can say was the first disciple in order of time and of heroism, and still is, as she bravely makes headway against the whole town which sneers at her because she is faithful to Me, and she resists the voice of her own blood which spares her no reproach because she is faithful to Me, and you will see that women disciples are better than you disciples.»

«I admit that, it is true. But which women disciples are there in Nazareth? Alphaeus' daughters, the mothers of Ishmael and Aser and their sisters. And that is all. Too few. I would rather not come back to Nazareth not to see all that.»

«Poor mother! You would give her deep sorrow» says Mary intervening in the conversation.

«That's true» says James. «She hopes so much to reconcile our brothers to Jesus and to us. I don't think that she wishes anything else. But we shall certainly not do it by staying away. So far I have listened to you by remaining alone. But as from tomorrow I want to go out and approach people... Because if we are to evangelize even Gentiles, shall we not evangelize our own town? I refuse to believe that it is so wicked and cannot be changed.»

Judas Thaddeus does not reply but he is obviously annoyed.

Simon Zealot who has been silent all the time, intervenes: «I do not wish to insinuate a suspicion. But let me ask you a question to relieve your minds. My question is: are you sure that in the stiffness of Nazareth no alien powers are involved, which have come from outside and which work satisfactorily here on a factor which, if men reasoned according to justice, should be the best guarantee that the Master is the Holy Man of God? The knowledge of the perfect life of Jesus, a citizen of Nazareth, should make it very easy for the Nazarenes to accept Him as the promised Messiah. I, and with me many of my age here in Nazareth, have known, more than you have, several alleged Messiahs, at least by repute. And I can assure you that their private lives discredited the most stubborn assertion of their Messianism. Rome persecuted them fiercely as rebels. But apart from their political ideas, which Rome could not allow where she rules, those false Messiahs deserved being punished for many private

reasons. We stirred their blood and supported them because they helped to satisfy our spirit of rebellion against Rome. We countenanced them because, dull as we are, we thought – until the Master did not clarify the truth, and unfortunately, even so, we still do not believe as we ought to, that is completely – we thought that they were the promised “king”. They lulled our dejected souls with hopes of national independence and reconstruction of the kingdom of Israel. But, oh! how miserable! What a fleeting and corrupt kingdom it would have been?! No, in actual fact to call those false Messiahs kings of Israel and founders of the promised Kingdom, *was to deeply humiliate the Messianic idea.* In the Master a holy life is joined to profound doctrine. And Nazareth is aware of that, as no other town is. Neither do I think of accusing Nazareth of misbelief in His supernatural birth, with which the Nazarenes are not acquainted. But His life!... Now, so much hatred, so much impenetrable resistance, nay, so much increased resistance... could it not originate from hostile manoeuvres? We know Jesus' enemies. We know what they are worth. Do you think that they have been inactive or absent only here, when they have preceded us, or marched side by side with us, or followed us everywhere to destroy the work of the Christ? Do not accuse Nazareth of being the only culprit. But weep for it, for it has been misled by Jesus' enemies.»

«What you have said, Simon, is very true. Weep for it...» says Jesus. And He is very sad.

John of Endor remarks: «You are quite right also in stating that a favourable factor changes into an unfavourable one, because the thoughts of man are seldom according to justice. The first obstacle here is the humble birth, the humble childhood, the humble boyhood, the humble youth of our Jesus. *Man forgets that real values are concealed under modest appearances* whereas nonentities are disguised as great people in order to impose themselves on the crowds.»

«It may be... But nothing will change my opinion of my fellow citizens. Whatever they have been told, they should have judged the Master by His real deeds and not by the words of unknown people.»

There is a long silence, broken only by the noise of cloth being divided into strips by the Blessed Virgin to make borders. Syntyche has never spoken, but has been most attentive. Her attitude is always one of deep respect and reservedness, and it is not quite so rigid only with Mary and the boy. But the boy has fallen asleep sitting on a little stool at Syntyche's feet, with his head on

his folded arm resting on her knees. She does not move and waits for Mary to hand her the strips.

«What an innocent sleep... He is smiling» remarks Mary bending over the sleeping child.

«I wonder what he is dreaming» says Simon smiling.

«He is a very intelligent boy. He learns quickly and he wants lucid explanations. He asks very shrewd questions and wants clear answers on everything. I admit that at times I am embarrassed in giving him an answer. Certain topics are above his age and sometimes they are above my capability to explain them» says John.

«Sure! Like that day... Do you remember, John? You had two vexing pupils that day! And very ignorant» says Syntyche smiling quietly and looking at the disciple with deep eyes.

John smiles too and says: «Yes. And you had a very poor teacher, who had to call the true Teacher to help him... because in none of the books which he had read, had that silly teacher found the answer to give to a child. Which proves that I am still an ignorant teacher.»

«Human science is still ignorance, John. The teacher was not inadequate, but what they had given him in order to be a teacher was not sufficient. Poor human science! How mutilated it looks to me! It makes me think of a deity which was honoured in Greece. Only pagan materialism could believe that the Greeks would possess the goddess of Victory forever, because she was wingless! Not only they stripped Victory of her wings, but they deprived us of our freedom... It would have been better if she had had her wings, in our belief. We could have believed that she was capable of flying and stealing celestial thunderbolts to strike our enemies. But in the state she was she gave us no hope, but only dejection and sadness. I could not look at her without suffering... And she seemed to be suffering and looked humiliated by her mutilation. She looked a symbol of sorrow, not of joy... And she was. And man does to Science what he did to Victory. He cuts off its wings, which could achieve supernatural knowledge and thus give him the key to discover many secrets of knowledge and of creation. They believed and believe that they can keep it a prisoner by cutting off its wings... And have thus made it dull and deficient... Winged Science would be Wisdom. As it is, it is only partial understanding.»

«And did My Mother reply to you that day?»

«Yes, She did, with perfect lucidity and chaste words, suitable to be heard by a boy and two adults of different sex, so that none of us had to blush.»

«What was it about?»

«The original sin, Master. I wrote Your Mother's explanation, so that I would remember it» says Syntyche, and John of Endor also says: «So did I. I think it will be one of the points we will be asked to clarify, if we go among the Gentiles one day. But I do not think I will be going because...»

«Why, John?»

«Because I will not live long.»

«But would you go willingly?»

«More than many people in Israel, because I am not biased. And also... Yes, also because I have set a bad example among the Gentiles at Cintium and in Anatolia. I would have liked to do some good where I did wrong. The good to be done: take Your word there and make You known... But it would have been too great an honour... I do not deserve it.»

Jesus looks at him smiling but does not say anything in that connection. He asks: «And have you no other questions to ask?»

«I have one. It occurred to me the other evening when You were talking to the boy about idleness. I endeavoured to find an answer, but I was not successful. I intended to wait until the Sabbath and ask You, when our hands are not active and our souls, in Your hands, are elevated to God» says Syntyche.

«You may ask Me now, while we are awaiting bedtime.»

«This is it, Master. You said that those who become slack in their spiritual work grow feeble and are predisposed to spiritual diseases. Is that right?»

«Yes, woman.»

«Now that appears to me to be in contrast with what I have heard from You and from Your Mother on original sin, its effects in us and the fact that we will be freed from it through You. You taught me that Redemption will cancel the original sin. I do not think that I am wrong if I say that it will not be cancelled in everybody, but only in those who believe in You.»

«Which is true.»

«So I will not take into account the others, but only one of those who have been saved. I will consider him after the effects of Redemption. His soul is no longer stained with original sin. He is therefore once again in the possession of Grace as our First Parents were. Does that, then, not give his soul a strength unassailable by any weakness? You will say: "Man commits personal sins also." I agree. But they will vanish as well through Your Redemption. I will not ask You how. But I suppose that You will leave some means, some symbols... as evidence that Your Redemption has actually taken place; and I do not know how it will happen, although what is referred to You in the Holy Book makes one shudder, and I hope that it will be a symbolical suffering, confined to the morale, although moral grief is not a false impression and is perhaps more dreadful than physical pain. You will leave some means, some symbols. Every religion has them, and at times they are called mysteries... The baptism, at present in force in Israel, is one, is it not?»

«It is. Also in My Religion there will be signs of My Redemption to be applied to souls to purify, strengthen, enlighten, support, nourish and absolve them, but with a different name from the one mentioned by you.»

«So? If they are absolved also of personal sins, they will always be in grace... So how can they be weak and predisposed to spiritual diseases?»

«I will make a comparison for you. Let us take a new born baby, who is healthy and strong and was born of very healthy parents. He has no physical hereditary taint. His body is perfect both with regard to its skeleton and its organs and his blood is wholesome. He has therefore all the necessary requisites to grow strong and sound, also because his mother has plenty nourishing milk. But in the early days of his life he suffered from a very serious disease, of unknown origin. It was a real deadly disease. He recovers with difficulty by the mercy of God, Who keeps him alive when life was on the point of departing from his little body. Well, do you think that later that boy will be as strong as if he never had had that disease? No, *he will suffer from an everlasting state of debility*. Even if it is not evident, it will still be there and he will be predisposed to diseases with greater ease than if he had never been ill. Some organ of his will not be as wholesome as previously. And his blood will not be quite so strong and pure as previously. And thus he will catch illnesses more easily. And such illnesses, every time he contracts them, will make him more exposed to be taken ill. The same applies in the spiritual field. *The Original sin will be cancelled in those who believe in Me. But their souls will still have an inclination to sin*, which they would not have

had, had there been no Original sin. *It is therefore necessary to continuously watch and take care of one's soul*, as a solicitous mother does with her little son, who has been left weak by an infantile disease. So you must not be idle, but always active to grow stronger in virtue. If one falls into sluggishness or tepidity, one will be more easily seduced by Satan. And *each grave sin, which is like a serious relapse, will always predispose one to diseases and spiritual death*. But if Grace, restored by Redemption, is assisted by an *active indefatigable will*, it will remain. Nay, it will increase, because it will be associated with the virtue achieved by man. *Holiness and Grace!* Which safe wings to fly to God! Have you understood?»

«Yes, my Lord. *You, that is the Most Holy Trinity, give the basic Means to man. Man with his work and care must not destroy it*. I understand. *Every grave sin destroys Grace, that is, the health of the spirit. The signs which You will leave us, will give health back, that is true. But an obstinate sinner, who does not struggle to avoid sin, will become weaker each time, even if he is forgiven each time. One must therefore be vigilant in order not to perish*. Thank You, Master... Marjiam is waking up. It's late...».

«Yes. Let us pray all together and then we will go to rest.»

Jesus stands up, imitated by everybody, also by the boy still half asleep. And the «Our Father» resounds loud and harmonious in the little room.

307. Jesus and the Wife of His Cousin Simon.

20th October 1945.

Jesus with Simon Zealot and Marjiam goes through Nazareth towards the country stretching towards Cana. And He crosses His sceptical hostile town, along the more central streets, and cuts diagonally across the market square, crowded in the early morning. Many turn to look at Him; very few citizens greet Him, women, particularly elderly ones, smile at Him, but with the exception of few children, no one comes to Him. People whisper after He has gone by. Jesus certainly sees everything, but pretends He does not. He speaks to Simon or to the boy, who is between them, and proceeds on His way.

They are now at the last houses. A woman, about forty years old, is on the doorstep of one of them. She seems to be waiting for someone. When she sees Jesus, she makes the gesture of moving, then she stops and lowers her head blushing.

«She is a relative of Mine. She is the wife of Simon of Alphaeus» says Jesus to the apostle.

The woman seems to be on tenterhooks, overwhelmed by clashing sentiments. She changes colour, raises and lowers her head, and her face expresses a keen desire to speak, which is restrained by some reason.

«Peace to you, Salome» greets Jesus when He arrives near her.

The woman looks at Him as if she were surprised at the kindness in the voice of her Relative and she replies, blushing even more: «Peace to...» A lump in her throat prevents her from ending the sentence. She hides her face in her folded arm and weeps desolately, leaning against the doorpost.

«Why are you weeping thus, Salome? Is there anything I can do to console you? Come here, round the corner, and tell Me what the matter is...» and He takes her by the elbow and leads her into a little lane between her house and her neighbour's kitchen garden.

Simon stays at the entrance of the lane with Marjiam who is utterly astonished.

«What is the matter, Salome? You know that I have always loved you. I have always loved you all. And I still love you. You must believe that and trust Me...»

She stops weeping now and again, as if she wanted to listen to those words and understand their true meaning, then she resumes weeping more loudly, uttering disconnected words: «Yes, You... We But not I... Not even Simon... But he is more foolish than I am I said: “Call Jesus”... But the whole village is against us... against You me... and my boy...» When she touches the tragical point, her weeping becomes tragical, too. She writhes and moans striking her face as if she were mad with grief.

Jesus grasps her hands saying: «Don't do that. I am here to comfort you. Speak, and I will do everything...»

The woman looks at Him with eyes wide open with astonishment and grief. But hope gives her energy to speak and to speak in an orderly way: «Will You have mercy on me, even if Simon is guilty? Will You?... Oh! Jesus... You save

everybody! My boy! Alphaeus, the last one, is ill... he is dying!... You loved Alphaeus. You used to carve toys in wood for him... You lifted him up that he might pick the grapes and figs of Your trees... and before You left... to travel about, You used to teach him so many good things... Now You would not be able... He is as good as dead... He will never eat grapes or figs again. He will never learn anything...» and she weeps her heart out.

«Salome, be good. Tell Me, what is the matter with him?»

«He is seriously ill with stomach trouble. He has been shouting, suffering terribly and delirious for days. Now he does not speak any more. He is like one whose head has been struck. He moans but does not answer. He can hardly moan. He is deathly pale and his body is getting cold. For days I have begged Simon to come to You. But... Oh! I have always loved him, but now I hate him because he is a fool and for a foolish idea he is allowing my son to die. But, if he dies, I will go away. I will go back to my house. With the other children. He is not capable of being a father at the right moment. And I am defending my children. I will go away. Yes, I will. People can say what they like. But I am going away.»

«Do not say that. Give up your idea of revenge.»

«Of justice. I rebel against them all. See? I had to wait for You, because none of them would say to You: “Come”. But I do. And I had to do it as if it were something wrong. And I cannot say to You: “Come in”, because Joseph's relatives are in the house and...»

«It is not necessary. Can you promise Me that you will forgive Simon? That you will always be a good wife to him? If you promise Me, I will say to you: “Go home, your son is cured and will smile at You” – Can you believe that?»

«I believe in You. Against the whole world, I do believe in You.»

«And can you forgive as you believe?»

«... But... will You really cure him?»

«Not only I will. But I promise you that Simon will cease doubting about Me, and little Alphaeus, your other children, you and your husband will all come back to My house. Mary speaks of you so often...»

«Oh! Mary! Mary! She was there when Alphaeus was born... Yes, Jesus. I will forgive. I will not say anything to him... No. I will say to him: “This is how

Jesus replies to your behaviour: giving your son back to you". I can say that!»

«Yes, you can... Go, Salome. Go. Weep no more. Goodbye. Peace to you, good Salome. Go now.» He takes her back to the door, He watches her go in, He smiles seeing that in her anxiety she runs along the vestibule without even closing the door, and He sets it ajar, slowly, and closes it.

He then turns to His two companions and says: «And now let us go where we had to go...»

«Do You think that Simon will turn?» asks the Zealot.

«He is not an infidel. He only allows stronger people to dominate him.»

«Well, then! Stronger than a miracle!»

«You can see that you have replied by yourself... I am glad I saved the child. I saw him when he was only a few hours old, and he has always been very fond of Me...»

«As I am? And will he become a disciple?» asks Marjiam keenly and he looks rather sceptical that anyone can love Jesus as he does.

«You love Me as a boy and as a disciple. Alphaeus loved Me only as a boy. But later he will love Me also as a disciple. But for the time being he is only a little boy. He will soon be eight years old. You will meet him.»

«So I am the only boy and disciple?»

«You are, at present. You are the head of the boy disciples. When you are a man remember that you were as good a disciple as men, and so open your arms to all the children who will come to you seeking Me and will say: "I want to be a disciple of Christ." Will you do that?»

«I will» Marjiam promises gravely...

They are now in the open sunny country and they move away from me in the bright sunshine...

308. Simon Goes Back to Jesus.

21st October 1945.

They are made welcome in a poor house where there is a little grandmother surrounded by a little group of children, from ten down to about two years old. The house is situated in the middle of fields, rather neglected, many of which are meadows with a few surviving fruit-trees.

«Peace to you, Johanna. Are things better today? Did they come and help you?»

«Yes, Master and Jesus. And they told me that they will come back to sow. It will be late, but they tell me that it will grow.»

«Of course, it will. What would be a miracle of the earth and of seed, will become a miracle of God. So a perfect miracle. Your fields will be the best in this area, and these little birds which are around you will have plenty corn for their mouths. Do not weep any more. Next year the situation will improve very much. But I will still help you. Or better: a good lady whose name is the same as yours, and who is never sated with doing good, will help you. Look: this is for you. It will enable you to make both ends meet until harvest-time.»

The old woman takes the purse and Jesus' hand at the same time and weeping kisses the latter. She then asks: «Tell me who this good lady is, that I may mention her name to the Lord.»

«A disciple of Mine and a sister of yours. Her name is known to Me and to the Father in Heaven.»

«Oh! It's You!...»

«I am poor, Johanna. I give what people give Me. Of My own I have but miracles. And I am sorry that I did not hear of your misfortune before. I came as soon as Susanna told Me. Too late now. But the work of God will shine brighter thus.»

«Late! Yes, it is late! Death was so quick in mowing here! And it took the young ones. Not me, now useless. Not these: immature ones. But those fit to work. Cursed be the moon of Elul, laden with evil influence!»

«Do not curse the planet. It has nothing to do with it... Are these little ones good? Come here. See? Also this boy has no father or mother. And he cannot even live with his grandfather. But God does not abandon him. And will not

abandon him as long as he is good. Is that right, Marjiam?»

Marjiam nods assent and speaks to the little ones who have gathered round him, they are younger than he is, but some of them are a good bit taller. He says: «Oh! It is true that God does not abandon one. I can say so. My grandfather prayed for me. And Your father and mother certainly prayed for you in the next world. And God heard those prayers, because He is Very Good, and He always hears the prayers of just people, whether they are living or dead. Your deceased parents and your dear granny here have certainly prayed for you. Do you love her?»

«Yes, yes...» the peeping of the orphan swarm rises enthusiastically.

Jesus becomes silent in order to listen to the conversation of His little disciple and the orphans.

«That's right. We must not make old people weep. In actual fact we must not make anybody weep, because those who grieve their neighbour, grieve God. But old people! The Master is kind to everybody. But He is more than kind and loving with old people and children. Because children are innocent and old people suffer. They have already wept so much! We must love them twice, three times, ten times, for those who no longer love them. Jesus always says that he who does not honour an old person is doubly-wicked, like he who ill-treats a child. Because old people and children cannot defend themselves. So be good to your old mother.»

«Sometimes I do not help her...» says one of the bigger ones.

«Why? After all you eat the bread which she procures for you with her work! Does it not taste of tears when you upset her? And you, woman, (the woman is ten years old at most and she is a very thin pale girl) do you help her?»

The little brothers reply all together: «Oh! Rachel is good! She stays up until late to spin the little wool we have and she became feverish working in the field to prepare it to be sown when our father was dying.»

«God will reward you for that» says Marjiam gravely.

«He has already rewarded me by relieving my granny of her worry.»

Jesus intervenes: «Do you not want anything else?»

«No, Lord.»

«But are you cured?»

«No, Lord. But it does not matter. Even if I die now, my grandmother is assisted. Previously I was sorry to die because I helped her.»

«But death is dreadful, child...»

«As God helps me in life, He will help me in death and I will go to my mother... Oh! don't weep, grandmother! I love you, too, dear grandmother. I will not say that again if it makes you weep. Nay, if you wish so, I will ask the Lord to cure me... Don't weep, my little mother...» and she embraces the desolate old woman.

«Cure her, Lord. You made my grandfather happy because of me. Make this old woman happy now.»

«Graces are obtained through sacrifices. What sacrifice will you make to obtain it?» asks Jesus seriously.

Marjiam thinks... He seeks the most painful thing to give up... and then he smiles: «I will have no more honey for a whole month.»

«That is not much! The month of Chislev is already far gone...»

«When I say a month I mean the four phases of the moon. And just think... during these days there is the Feast of Lights and honey cakes...»

«That is true. Well, Rachel will recover, thanks to you. Now let us go. Goodbye, Johanna. I will come back before I go away. Goodbye, Rachel, goodbye, Toby. Be good. Goodbye, you little ones. May My blessing rest upon you all, and My peace be with you.»

They go out followed by the blessing of the old woman and the children. Marjiam, after being «apostle and victim» begins to jump like a little kid and runs ahead.

Simon remarks with a smile: «His first sermon and his first sacrifice. He is a promising boy, don't You think so, Master?»

«Yes, I do. But he has preached before. Also to Judas of Simon...»

«... and the Lord seems to make children speak to him... Probably to avoid revenge by him...»

«Not revenge... I do not think he would go so far. But strong reactions, yes... He who deserves being reproached, does not love the truth... But it must be

spoken...» says Jesus with a sigh.

Simon watches Him, then he asks: «Master, tell me the truth. You have sent him away, and You decided to send everybody home for the Dedication, to prevent Judas from being in Galilee just now. I will not ask You and I do not want You to tell me why it is better that the man from Kerioth should not be with us. I only wish to know whether I have guessed right. We all think so, You know? Even Thomas. He said to me: “I will go without reacting because I realise that there is a serious reason behind it.” And he added: “The Master is right in doing what He does. There are too many Nahums, Sadocs, Johanans and Eleazars among Judas' friends...” Thomas is not stupid!... And he is not bad, although he is very much a man. He is very sincere in his love for You...»

«I know. And what you all suspected is true. You will soon learn the reason...»

«We are not asking You to tell us.»

«But I will have to ask you to help Me and I must tell you.»

Marjiam runs back and says: «Master over there, at the junction of the path with the main road, there is Your cousin Simon; he is all of a sweat like one who has been running. He asked me: “Where is Jesus?” I replied: “He is here, behind me, with Simon Zealot.” He said to me: “Will He be passing here?” “Of course” I replied. “He will pass here to go back home, unless He does what birds do: they fly from all directions to go back to their nests. Do you want Him?” I asked him. He remained uncertain. And yet I am sure that he wants You.»

«Master, he has already seen his wife... Let us do this. Marjiam and I will leave You free. We will go round the back of Nazareth. In any case... we are not in a hurry. And You will go along the main road.»

«Yes, thank you, Simon. I will see you later.»

They part and Jesus quickens His step towards the main road. There is Simon, leaning against a trunk, panting and drying his perspiration. As soon as he sees Jesus, he raises his arms... he then drops them and lowers his head dejectedly.

When Jesus arrives near him, He lays a hand on his shoulder asking: «What do you want, Simon? To make Me happy with a word of love, which I have been awaiting for many days?»

Simon lowers his head even more and is silent...

«Speak, then. Am I perhaps a stranger to you? No, you really are always My good brother Simon, and I am your little Jesus, Whom you used to carry in your arms, with some difficulty, but with so much love, when we came back to Nazareth.»

The man covers his face with both hands and falls on his knees: «Oh! My Jesus! I am the guilty one, but I have been punished enough...»

«Come on, stand up! We are relatives. What is it that you want?»

«My boy! He is...» a lump in his throat prevents him from speaking.

«Your boy? What about him?»

«He is dying. And Salome's love is dying with him... and I am left with double remorse: I am losing son and wife at the same time... Last night I thought that he was really dead and she looked like a hyena. She shouted at me: “Murderer of your son!” I prayed that that might not happen, and I swore to myself that I would come to You, if the boy recovered a little, also at the cost of being driven away – as I actually deserve – to tell You that You are the only one who can avert my calamity. At dawn the boy recovered a little... I ran from my house to Yours, round the back of the town, to avoid any possible hindrance... I knocked at the door. Mary opened and was amazed. She could have ill-treated me. But she only said: “What is the matter with you, poor Simon?” And She caressed me as if I were a child... And that made me weep. And my pride and hesitancy ceased thus. What Judas told us cannot be true, I mean Judas Your apostle, not my brother. I did not say that to Mary, but I say it to myself, beating my chest, and casting contumelies on myself ever since. I asked Her: “Is Jesus in? It's for Alphaeus. He is dying... Mary replied: “Run! He has gone towards Cana with the boy and an apostle. He is on the Cana road. But you must be quick. He went out at dawn. He is about to come back. I will pray that you may find Him.” Not one word of reproach, not even one, although I deserve so many!»

«Neither will I reproach you. But I open My arms to you to...»

«Alas! To tell me that Alphaeus is dead!...»

«No. To tell you that I love you.»

«Come, then! Quick!»

«No. It is not necessary.»

«Are You not coming? Ah! Are You not forgiving me? Or is Alphaeus dead? But even if he is, Jesus, since You raise the dead, give me back my son! Oh! Good Jesus!... Holy Jesus! Whom I abandoned!... Jesus... Jesus...» The solitary road is filled with the tears of the man, who, kneeling down, fingers Jesus' mantle convulsively, or kisses His feet, tortured by sorrow, remorse and paternal love...

«Did you not go home before coming here?»

«No. I ran here like a madman... Why? Is there more trouble? Has Salome already run away? Has she become mad? She seemed mad last night...»

«Salome has spoken to Me. She wept, she believed. Go home, Simon. Your son is cured.»

«You!... You!... You have done that, for me who offended You by believing that snake? Oh! Lord! I do not deserve so much! Forgive me! Tell me what You want me to do to make amends, to let You know that I love You, to convince You that I suffered in being stand-offish, to tell You that I wanted to speak to You, since You have been here, even before Alphaeus was so ill!... But... but...»

«Never mind. It is all over. I have forgotten about it. Do the same yourself. And forget also the words of Judas of Kerioth. He is a boy. All I want from you is this: that you will never repeat those words to My disciples, to My apostles, and least of all, to My Mother. That is all. Now go home, Simon. Go and be in peace... Do not delay in taking part in the joy which has filled your house. Go.» He kisses him and gently pushes him towards Nazareth.

«Are You not coming with me?»

«I will wait for you with Salome and Alphaeus in My house. Go. And remember that the present joy comes to you, thanks to your wife, who believed the truth.»

«Do You mean that I...»

«No. I mean that I have understood that you have repented. And you repented because of her cry accusing you... God really shouts through the mouths of good people, reproaching and advising!... And I saw the firm humble faith of Salome. Go, I tell you. Do not wait any longer to thank her.»

And Jesus almost pushes him roughly to persuade him to go. And when Simon finally goes away, He blesses him... and then shakes His head in mute soliloquy and tears slowly run down His pale cheeks... One word only hints at the trend of

His thought: «Judas!»...

He sets out along the same road taken by the Zealot, behind the boundary of the village, towards His house.

309. Simon Peter at Nazareth.

22nd October 1945.

It is late in the morning when Peter, all alone and unexpected, arrives at the house in Nazareth. He is laden like a porter with baskets and little sacks. But he is so happy that he feels neither weight nor fatigue.

He smiles blissfully at Mary, Who goes to open the door, and he greets Her with joy and veneration at the same time. He then asks: «Where are the Master and Marjiam?»

«They are on the embankment, above the grotto, but towards Alphaeus' house. I think that Marjiam is picking olives and Jesus is certainly meditating. I will call them.»

«I will see to that.»

«Leave all your bundles first.»

«No. They are a surprise for the boy. I like to see him open his eyes wide and rummage eagerly... It makes him so happy, poor boy.»

He goes out into the kitchen garden, he goes under the embankment, he hides in the cavity of the grotto, and he then shouts, altering his voice a little: «Peace to You, Master», and then in his natural voice: «Marjiam!...»

Marjiam's shrill voice, which filled the peaceful air with exclamations, becomes quiet... There is a pause, then the almost girlish voice of the boy asks: «Master, but was that not my father calling me?»

Jesus was perhaps so engrossed in thought that He did not hear anything, and He openly admits it. Peter calls once again: «Marjiam!» and he laughs his usual hearty laugh.

«Oh! it is him! Father! Father! Where are you?» He leans out to look in the kitchen garden, but does not see anything...

Jesus also comes forward and looks... He sees Mary Who is smiling on the doorstep and John and Syntyche who are also smiling from the room at the end of the kitchen garden near the stone-oven.

But Marjiam comes to a decision: he jumps from the embankment, just near the grotto, and Peter is ready to catch him before he touches the ground. It is touching to see how they greet each other. Jesus, Mary and the two disciples at the end of the kitchen garden watch them, smiling, and then they all gather round the little fond group.

Peter frees himself, as best he can, from the grip of the boy to bow to Jesus and greet Him once again. Jesus embraces him with the boy, who is still clinging to the apostle and asks: «And mother?»

But Peter replies to Jesus Who asks him: «Why did you come so soon?»

«Did You think I could stay away so long without seeing You? And then... Eh! then there is Porphirea who did not leave Me in peace: "Go and see Marjiam. Take him this. Take him that." She seemed to think that Marjiam was among highwaymen or in a desert. The other night she got up just to make honey cakes and as soon as they were baked, she sent me off...»

«Ah! honey cakes!...» shouts Marjiam. Then he becomes silent.

«Yes. They are in here with figs dried in the oven, olives and red apples. And she baked an olive oil loaf for you. And she sent you some cheese made with the milk of your sheep. And there is also a water resistant tunic. And then, and then... I don't know what else there is. What? Are you no longer in a hurry? Are you weeping? Oh! Why?»

«Because I would have preferred you to bring her here, instead of all these things... I am very fond of her, you know?»

«Oh! Divine Mercy! Who would have thought that?! If she were here listening to you, she would melt like butter...»

«Marjiam is right. You could have come with her. She certainly wishes to see him after such a long time. We women are just like that with our children...» says Mary.

«Well... But she will see him before long, won't she, Master?»

«Yes, after the Dedication, when we go away... No... When you come back, after the Dedication, you will come with her. She will stay here with him for a few days, and then they will go back to Bethsaida together.»

«Oh! How lovely! I will be here with two mothers!» The boy is cheerful once again and happy.

They all go into the house and Peter relieves himself of his bundles.

«Here is some dried, pickled and fresh fish. It will be useful to Your Mother. And here is some of that cream cheese, which You like so much, Master. And here are some eggs for John. I hope they are not broken... No. Good. And some grapes. I got them from Susanna at Cana, where I slept. Then... Ah! Look at this Marjiam! Look how clear it is. It seems to be made with Mary's hair... And he opens a jar of treacly honey.

«Why so much stuff? You have gone to a lot of trouble, Simon» says Mary looking at the bundles, parcels, vases and jars on the table.

«Trouble? No. I had a good haul and I made a good profit. That, as far as the fish is concerned. With regard to the rest: it is all home made. It costs nothing but gives so much joy to bring it. In any case... We are now at the Dedication... That is the custom. Isn't it? Are you not tasting the honey?»

«I cannot» says Marjiam seriously.

«Why? Are you not well?»

«No. But I cannot take it.»

«But why?»

The boy blushes but does not reply. He looks at Jesus and is silent. Jesus smiles and explains: «Marjiam made a vow to obtain a grace. He cannot eat honey for four weeks.»

«All right. You will eat it after... Take the jar just the same... Just imagine! I didn't think he was... so...»

«So generous, Simon. He who becomes accustomed to penance from his childhood, will find the path of virtue easy throughout life» says Jesus, while the boy goes away with the jar in his hands.

Peter watches him go and is amazed. He then asks: «Is the Zealot not in?»

«He has gone to Mary of Alphaeus. But he will soon be back. You will be sleeping together tonight. Come into the next room, Simon Peter.»

They go out while Mary and Syntyche tidy up the room invaded by bundles.

«Master... I have come to see You and the boy. That is true. But also because I have been thinking a lot these days, particularly after the arrival of three poisonous hornets... whom I told more lies than there are fish in the sea. They are now going to Gethsemane as they think that John of Endor is there and then they will be going to Lazarus, hoping to find Syntyche and You there. Let them walk!... But they will come back and... Master, they want to cause You trouble because of those two wretched people...»

«I made all the necessary arrangements months ago. When they come back looking for these two persecuted people, they will not find them anywhere in Palestine. See these chests? I made them for John and Syntyche. Did you notice all those folded garments near the loom? They are for them. Are you surprised?»

«Yes, Master. Where are You sending them?»

«To Antioch.»

Peter whistles meaningfully and then asks: «To whom? And how will they go there?»

«To a house belonging to Lazarus. The last one Lazarus has where his father governed in the name of Rome. And they will go by sea...»

«Ah! I see! Because if John had to go there on foot...»

«By sea. I am glad I can speak to you about it. I was going to send Simon to say to you: “Come”, to prepare everything. Listen. Two or three days after the Feast of the Dedication we will leave from here few at a time, in order not to attract anybody's attention. The group will be formed by Me, you, your brother, James and John, My two cousins, John and Syntyche. We will go to Ptolemais! From there you will take them by boat to Tyre. There you will board a ship sailing to Antioch, as if you were proselytes going back home.

You will then come back and you will find Me at Achzib. I will be on the mountain top every day. In any case the Spirit will guide you...»

«What? Are You not coming with us?»

«I would be noted too much. I want to give peace to John's soul.»

«And what will I do since I have never been away from here?»

«You are not a child... and soon you will have to go much farther than Antioch. I trust you. You can see that I esteem you very much...»

«And what about Philip and Bartholomew?»

«They will come and meet us at Jotopata and will evangelize while waiting for us. I will write to them and you will take the letter.»

«And... those two over there, do they already know their destiny?»

«No. I want them to celebrate the Feast in peace...»

«H'm. Poor people... Fancy that! People are persecuted by criminals and...»

«Do not foul your mouth, Simon.»

«No, Master... Listen... How will we carry these chests? And John? He looks seriously ill to me.»

«We will take a donkey.»

«No. We will take a cart.»

«And who will drive it?»

«Eh! If Judas of Simon learned to row, Simon of Jonah will learn to drive a cart. It should not be difficult to lead a donkey by the bridle. We will put the chests and those two in the cart... and we will go on foot. Yes, it is better to do that, believe me.»

«And who will give us the cart? Remember that I do not want our departure to be noted.» Peter thinks... He makes up his mind: «Have You any money?»

«Yes. Still quite a lot of the money we got for Misace's jewels.»

«In that case it is easy. Give me a sum. I will get a donkey and cart from someone and... yes... we will make a present of the donkey to some poor wretch and the cart... we will see... I am glad I came. And must I really come back with my wife?»

«Yes. It is better.»

«Good. But those two poor wretches! I am sorry that we shall no longer have

John with us. True, we would not have had him for long... But, poor man! He might have died here, like Jonah...»

«They would not have allowed him. The world hates those who redeem themselves.»

«He will feel humiliated...»

«I will find a reason to make him leave with – a relieved mind.»

«Which reason?»

«The same as I used to send away Judas of Simon: to work for Me.»

«Ah!... The difference is that in John it will be holiness, whereas in Judas it is only pride.»

«Simon, do not backbite.»

«That is more difficult than to make a fish sing! It is the truth, Master, it is not backbiting... But I think that Simon has come with Your brothers. Let us go...»

«Let us go. Not a word to anybody.»

«Are You telling me? I cannot omit mentioning the truth when I speak, but I can be silent, if I want. And I do want! I swore it to myself. Imagine me going to Antioch! To the ends of the earth! Oh! I wish I were already back! I shall sleep no more until it is all over...»

They go out and I see no more.

310. Jesus Speaks about the Holy Economy of Universal Love.

23rd October 1945.

I do not know whether it is the same day, but I suppose it is, because Peter is sitting at the family table in Nazareth. The meal is almost over and Syntyche gets up to put on the table some apples, nuts, grapes and almonds which end the supper, because it is evening and lamps have already been lit.

They are talking about lamps when Syntyche brings the fruit. Peter says: «This

year we will light an extra lamp, and then more and more, for you, son. Because we want to light it for you, even if you are here. It is the first time we light one for a boy...» and Simon is moved when he ends: «It would certainly be lovelier, if you were there...»

«Last year, Simon, it was I who sighed for My Son far away, and with Me, Mary of Alphaeus, Salome and also Mary of Simon in her house at Kerioth, and Thomas' mother...»

«Oh! Judas' mother! Her son will be with her this year... but I do not think she will be happier... Never mind... We were at Lazarus'. How many lights!... It looked like a sky of gold and fire. Lazarus has his sister this year... But I am sure of speaking the truth when I say that they will be sighing because You are not there. And where will we be next year?»

«I will be very far away...» whispers John.

Peter turns round to look at him, as he is sitting beside John, and he is on the point of asking something, but fortunately he controls himself, because of a meaningful look of Jesus.

Marjiam asks: «Where will you be?»

«By the mercy of the Lord I hope to be in Abraham's bosom...»

«Oh! do you want to die? Do you not want to evangelize? Are you not sorry to die before evangelizing?»

«The word of the Lord is to be announced by holy lips. It is a great favour if He allowed me to hear it and redeem myself through it. I would have liked... But it is late...»

«And yet you will evangelize. You have already done so. So much so that you have attracted people's attention. You will therefore be called just the same an evangelizing disciple, even if you do not travel about preaching the Gospel; and in the next life you will receive the prize reserved for My evangelizers.»

«Your promise makes me desire death... Every minute in life may conceal a snare, and weak as I am, I may not be able to overcome it. If God receives me, being satisfied with what I have done, is that not great bounty, which I must bless?»

«I solemnly tell you that death will be supreme bounty for many, who will thus

know to what extent man raves, from a place where peace will comfort them for such knowledge, and will change it into hosanna because it will be linked to the unutterable joy of liberation from Limbo.»

«And where shall we be in future years, Lord?» asks Simon Zealot who has been listening diligently.

«Where it will please the Eternal Father. Do you want to engage the remote future, when we are not certain of the moment in which we live and whether we will be granted to end it? In any case, whatever the place where the future Dedications will be celebrated, it will always be a holy one provided you are there to fulfill the will of God.»

«Provided we are? And what about You?» asks Peter.

«I will always be where My beloved ones are.»

Mary has never spoken, but Her eyes have not ceased for one moment to scan the face of Her Son...

She is roused by Marjiam's remark who says: «Mother, why have You not put the honey cakes on the table? Jesus likes them and they are good for John's throat. And my father likes them, too...»

«And you, too» concludes Peter.

«As far as I am concerned... they do not exist. I promised...»

«That is why I did not put them on the table, My dear...» says Mary caressing him, because Marjiam is between Her and Syntyche, on one side of the table, while the four men are on the opposite side.

«No, no. You can bring them. Nay: You must bring them. And I will hand them out to everybody.»

Syntyche takes a lamp, goes out and comes back with the cakes. Marjiam takes the tray and begins to hand them out. He gives Jesus the most beautiful one, golden and raised like one made by a master confectioner. The next one in perfection is for Mary. Then it is the turn of Peter, Simon and Syntyche. But in order to serve John, the boy gets up and goes beside the old sick teacher and says to him: «I am giving you yours and mine, with a kiss, to thank you for what you teach me.» He then goes back to his place, lays the tray in the middle of the table resolutely and folds his arms.

«You make this delicious cake go the wrong way» says Peter, when he sees that Marjiam does not take any. And he adds: «At least a little bit. Here, take some of mine, so that you will not die to have some. You are suffering too much... Jesus will let you have it.»

«But if I did not suffer, I would have no merit, father. I offered this sacrifice exactly because I knew that it would make me suffer. After all... I have been so happy since I made it, that I seem to be full of honey. I taste it in everything, and I even seem to breathe it in the air...»

«That's because you are dying to have some...»

«No. It's because I know that God says to me: "You are doing the right thing, My son."»

«The Master would have satisfied you, even without this sacrifice. He loves you so much!»

«Yes. *But it is not fair that I should take advantage of it, just because He loves me.* In any case, He says that great is the reward in Heaven even for a cup of water offered in His name. I think that if it is great for a cup of water given to other people in His name, it must be great also for a cake or a little honey which one gives up out of love for a brother. Am I wrong, Master?»

«No, you have spoken wisely. In fact, I could have granted you what you asked for in favour of little Rachel, also without your sacrifice, because it was a good thing to do and My Heart desired it. But I did it with greater joy because I was helped by you. The love for our brothers is not confined to human means and limits, but it rises to much higher levels. When it is perfect, it really touches the throne of God and blends with His infinite Charity and Bounty. *The communion of saints is just this continuous activity, as God works continuously and in every way, to assist our brothers both in their material and spiritual needs, or in both,* as it is in the case of Marjiam, who relieves Rachel of her illness, by obtaining her cure, and at the same time he relieves the dejected spirit of old Johanna and kindles greater and greater trust in the Lord in all the hearts in the family. Even a spoonful of honey, offered as a sacrifice, *can help to bring peace and hope to an afflicted soul;* as a cake or any other food given up out of love, may obtain some bread, offered miraculously, for some starving person, *who is remote from us and will never be known to us;* and an angry word not uttered, out of spirit of sacrifice, although justified, *may prevent a remote crime;* as to resist the desire to pick a fruit, out of love, *may bring about a thought of resipiscence in a thief*

and thwart a theft. Nothing is lost in the holy economy of universal love: neither the heroic sacrifice of a boy before a dish of honey cakes, nor the holocaust of a martyr. Nay, I tell you that the holocaust of a martyr often originates from the heroic upbreeding imparted to him since his childhood for the love of God and his neighbour.»

«So it is really a good thing that I should always make sacrifices. For the time when we will be persecuted» says Marjiam earnestly.

«Persecuted?» asks Peter.

«Yes. Don't you remember that He said so? “You will be persecuted in My name.” You told me, the first time you came all alone to Bethsaida, in summer, to evangelize.»

«This boy remembers everything» comments Peter admiring him.

The supper is over. Jesus stands up. He prays for everybody and blesses them. And while the women go to tidy up the kitchen, Jesus and the men take seats in a corner of the room, where He begins to carve a piece of wood, which under the amazed eyes of Marjiam, takes the shape of a little sheep.

311. John of Endor Will Have to Go to Antioch. End of the Second Year.

24th October 1945.

It is a wet winter morning. Jesus is already up and is busy in His workshop. He is making small items. But in a corner there is a new loom, not a very big one, but well-shaped and polished.

Mary comes in with a cup of steaming hot milk. «Drink this, Jesus. You have been up so long. And it is damp and cold...»

«Yes, but at least I have been able to finish everything... The eight feast days had paralysed My work...» Jesus has sat down on the carpenter's bench, a little sideways, and drinks the milk while Mary looks at the loom and rubs Her hand on it caressingly.

«Are You blessing it, Mother?» asks Jesus smiling.

«No, I am caressing it because You made it. You blessed it by making it. It was a good idea to make it. It will be very useful to Syntyche. She is a very skillful weaver. It will help her to approach women and girls. What else have You made, I see thin shavings, of olive, I think, near the lathe?»

«I have made useful things for John. See? A stylus case and a writing board. And these desks in which he can keep his rolls. I could not have made all these things if Simon of Jonah had not thought of getting a cart. But now we can load these as well... and also through these little things they will feel that I love them...»

«You suffer in sending them away, do You not?»

«I do... For Myself and for them... I have waited up to the present moment to tell them and it is strange that Simon has not yet arrived with Porphyrea I must tell them now... I have had this pain in My heart all these days and even the light of the many lamps looked sad to Me... A suffering which I must now communicate to others... Ah! Mother, I would have liked to have kept all to Myself»

«My good Son!» Mary caresses His hand to comfort Him. There is silence... Then Jesus resumes speaking: «Is John up?»

«Yes. I heard him cough. He is perhaps in the kitchen taking his milk. Poor John!...» tears stream down Mary's cheeks.

Jesus stands up: «I am going... I must go and tell him. It will be easier with Syntyche... But with him... Mother, go to Marjiam, wake him up and pray while I speak to that man... I feel as if I had to rummage in his bowels. I may kill or paralyse his spiritual vitality... How painful, Father!... I am going...» and He is really depressed when He goes out.

He walks the few steps which separate Him from John's room, which is the same one where Jonah died, that is, Joseph's room. He meets Syntyche, who is coming in with a faggot from the stone oven and who greets Him, completely unaware of the situation. Although engrossed in thought He replies to the Greek woman's salutation and stops to look at a bed of lilies which are beginning to show a tiny tuft of leaves. But I am not sure that He really sees them... He then makes up His mind. He turns round and knocks at John's door, who opens and whose face brightens on seeing Jesus coming to him.

«May I come in for a moment?» asks Jesus.

«Oh! Master! Of course! I was writing what You said last night on prudence and obedience. I think You had better have a look at it, because I do not think that I remember everything on prudence.»

Jesus has entered the little room, which has already been tidied up and in which they have put a small table for the convenience of the old master. Jesus bends over the parchments and reads. «Very well. You have repeated it very well.»

«Here, see. I thought this sentence was not quite correct. You always say that it is not necessary to be solicitous about tomorrow and one's body. Now I thought that it was wrong to say that prudence, also with regard to things concerning tomorrow, is a virtue. An error of mine, of course.»

«No. You are not wrong. That is exactly what I said. *The exaggerated and fearful anxiety of a selfish person is different from the prudent care of a just person.* It is sinful to be avaricious for the future, which, perhaps, we shall never see. But it is not sinful to be thrifty to secure a piece of bread, also for one's relatives, when there is a shortage. The selfish care of one's body in sinful, when a person demands that all those around him should worry about him, and avoids all work or sacrifice lest his body should suffer, but it is not sinful to preserve it from wasteful diseases, the result of imprudent behaviour, which diseases are a burden for relatives and a loss of profitable work for ourselves. *Life is given by God. It is a gift of His. Consequently we must make a holy use of it, without being imprudent or selfish.* See? At times prudence suggests actions, which foolish people may consider cowardly or inconstant, whereas they are the result of holy prudence in the light of new events, which have occurred. For instance: if I sent you now right in the middle of people who might do you harm... for instance your wife's relatives or the watchmen of the mines where you worked, would I do a good or a bad thing?»

«I... I would not like pass judgement on You. But I would say that it would be better to send me elsewhere, where there is no danger of my little virtue being put to too hard a test.»

«There you are! You would judge wisely and prudently. That is why I would never send you to Bithynia or Mysia, where you have already been. Neither would I send you to Cintium, although you have a spiritual desire to go there. Your spirit might be overwhelmed by much human harshness and might fall back. Prudence therefore teaches Me not to send you where you would be

valueless, whereas I could send you elsewhere with a good profit for Me, for the souls of your neighbours and your own. Is that not right?»

As John is completely unaware of what his destiny has in store for him, he does not catch Jesus' allusions to the possibility of a mission outside Palestine. Jesus scans his face and sees that he is calm, completely happy to listen to Him, and quick in replying: «Of course, Master, I would be more useful elsewhere. When some days ago I said: "I would like to go among the Gentiles to set a good example where I set a bad one", I reproached myself saying: "Among the Gentiles, yes, because you are not biased as the Israelites. But not at Cintium, nor on the desolate mountains, where I lived as a convict and like a wolf in the lead mines and in the quarries of precious marbles. Not even for the sake of a perfect sacrifice could you go there. Your heart would be upset by recollections of cruelty, and if they recognised you, even if they did not act cruelly against you, they would say: 'Be quiet, murderer. We cannot listen to you' so it would be quite useless to go there." That is what I said to myself. And I was right.»

«You can therefore see that you possess prudence. I possess it, too. That is why I took you away from the hard work of apostolate, as is practised by the others, and I brought you here, to rest and be in peace.»

«Oh! yes! How peaceful it is! If I lived here for a hundred years, I would still be the same. It is a supernatural peace. And if I went away, I would take it with me. I will take it also to the next life... Recollections may still stir my heart and offences may make me suffer, because I am a man. But I will never be able to hate again, because hatred has been sterilised here for good, as far as its most remote ramifications. And I no longer have an aversion to women, whom I considered the filthiest and meanest animals on the earth. Your Mother is out of question. I venerated Her from the first moment I saw Her because I felt that She was different from all women. She is the perfume of woman, but the perfume of holy woman. Who does not love the scent of the purest flowers? But also the other women, the good women disciples, loving and patient under their sorrowful burdens, like Mary Clopas and Eliza; generous like Mary of Magdala, so complete in her change of life; kind and pure like Martha and Johanna; dignified, intelligent, thoughtful and upright, like Syntyche, have reconciled me with women. Syntyche, I admit it, is the one I like best. Affinity of mind and of circumstances make her dear to me: she was a slave, I a convict, and that allows me to be on familiar terms with her, which the difference with the others forbids. She is peace and tranquillity to me. I could not tell You exactly what

she means to me and what I consider her. As I am old compared to her, I see her as a daughter, the wise and studious daughter I would have liked to have... But I, a sick man whom she cures with so much love, a sad and solitary man who has grieved for and regretted his mother throughout his life, and has sought a mother in every woman, without ever finding one, I now see my dream becoming true in her and I feel the dew of motherly love descend upon my tired head and upon my soul while I am going towards my death... You can see that, as I perceive in Syntyche the soul of a daughter and of a mother, I see in her the perfection of womanhood and for her sake I forgive all the evil I received from women. If, what is an impossible case, that wretch of my wife, whom I killed, should rise from the dead, I feel that I would forgive her because I have now understood the soul of woman, prone to love, generous in giving herself... both in good and in evil.»

«I am glad that you have found all that in Syntyche. She will be a good companion to you for the rest of your days and you will do much good together. Because I will associate you...»

Jesus scans John once again. But there is no sign of roused attention in the disciple, although he is not a superficial person. Which divine mercy conceals his sentence until the crucial moment? I do not know. I know that John smiles saying: «We shall endeavour to serve You to the best of our ability.»

«Yes. And I am sure that you will do so, without discussing the work or the place, which I will allot to you, even if it should not be what you wish...»

John has a first inkling of what awaits him. His countenance and colour change. He becomes grave and pale and his only eye stares attentively and inquisitively at the face of Jesus, Who continues: «Do you remember, John, when I said to you, to dispel your doubts about God's forgiveness: "To let you understand Mercy I will employ you in special merciful deeds and I will apply to you the parables of mercy"?»

«Yes. And You did. You have convinced me and You have granted me the possibility to do deeds of mercy, and I would say, the most delicate ones, such as giving alms and teaching a boy, a Philistine and a Greek woman. That made it clear to me that God was aware of my true repentance, and thus He entrusted me with innocent souls or the souls of converts, that I might perfect them.»

Jesus embraces John, and draws him close to His side, as He is wont to do with the other John, and turning pale because of the grief He has to cause, He says:

«Also now God is going to entrust a delicate holy task to you. A task of predilection. Only you who are generous, unreserved and unbiased, wise, and above all, have offered yourself to all renunciations and penances to expiate the remaining purgation and debt you still had with God, only you can do it. Anybody else would refuse, and quite rightly, because he would be lacking the necessary requisites. Not one of My apostles possesses what you have, to go and preach the ways of the Lord... Further, your name is John. So you will be a Precursor of My Doctrine... you will prepare the way for your Master... nay, you will act in place of your Master, Who cannot go so far... (John starts and endeavours to free himself from Jesus' arm, in order to look at Him in the face, but he is not successful, because Jesus' hold is kind but authoritative, while His lips give the final blow...)... He cannot go so far... as far as Syria... as far as Antioch...»

«Lord!» shouts John, freeing himself with violence from Jesus' embrace. «Lord! To Antioch? Tell me that I have misunderstood You! Tell me, please!...» He is standing... His whole attitude is a supplication: his only eye, his face which has turned ashen-grey, his trembling lips, his outstretched shaking hands, his lowered head, which seems to be burdened by the news.

But Jesus cannot say: «You have misunderstood.» He opens His arms, standing up to receive the old teacher on His heart, and He opens His lips to confirm: «Yes, to Antioch. To a house of Lazarus'. With Syntyche. You shall leave tomorrow or the day after.»

John's desolation is really heart-rending. He half-frees himself from the embrace, and face to face, with his thin cheeks wet with tears, he cries: «Ah! You do not want me any longer!! In what have I offended You, my Lord?» He gets free of Jesus' grasp and throws himself on the table, in an outburst of heart-rending sobs interrupted by fits of coughing, insensible to Jesus' caresses and he moans: «You are driving me away, You are rejecting me, I will never see You again...»

Jesus is clearly grieved and He prays... He then goes out slowly and sees Mary with Marjiam at the kitchen door. The boy is frightened by John's weeping... A little farther away, there is Syntyche, who is also astonished. «Mother, come here a moment.»

Mary goes at once. She is pale. They go in together. Mary bends over the weeping man as if he were a poor boy, saying: «Good, be good, poor son of

Mine! Do not weep like that! You will hurt yourself.»

John raises his convulsed face and shouts: «He is sending me away!... I will die all alone, far away... Oh! He might have waited a few months and let me die here. Why this punishment? In what have I sinned? Have I ever troubled You? Why give me all this peace, and then... and then...» He collapses once again on the table, weeping louder, panting...

Jesus lays a hand on his lean trembling shoulders, saying: «And can you possibly believe that if I could have, I would not have kept you here? Oh! John! There are dreadful necessities on the way of the Lord! And I am the first to suffer thereby, as I have to bear My sorrow and the sorrow of the whole world. Look at Me, John. See whether My face is the face of one who hates you, and is tired of you... Come here, in My arms, and feel how My heart is throbbing with grief. Understand Me, John, do not misunderstand Me. This is the last expiation God imposes on you, to open the gates of Heaven to you. Listen...» and He lifts him up and holds him in His arms. «Listen... Mother, go out for a moment... Listen now, that we are alone. You know who I am. Do you firmly believe that I am the Redeemer?»

«Of course I do. That is why I wanted to stay with You, for good, until death...»

«Death... My death will be a dreadful one!...»

«Mine, I mean. My death...»

«Yours will be placid, comforted by My presence, which will instill the certainty of God's love into you, and consoled by the love of Syntyche, as well as by the joy of having prepared the triumph of the Gospel in Antioch. But Mine! You would see My body reduced to a mass of flesh covered with wounds, covered with spittle, outraged, abandoned to an enraged crowd, put to death hanging from a cross like a criminal... Could you bear all that?»

John, who at each detail of how Jesus will be dealt with during His Passion has groaned: «No, no!», shouts a sharp «no» and adds: «I would begin to hate mankind again... But I will be dead, because You are young and...»

«And I will see but one more Dedication.»

John looks at Him, struck with terror...

«I told you secretly to let you know that that is one of the reasons why I am sending you away. But you will not be the only one. I will send away,

beforehand, all those whom I do not want to be upset more than their strength can possibly stand. And do you think that is lack of love?...»

«No, my martyr God... But I have to leave You... and I will die far away from You.»

«In the name of the Truth which I am, I promise you that I will be bent over the pillow of your agony.»

«How can that be, if I am so far away and You say that You cannot come so far? You say that to make my departure less sad...»

«Johanna of Chuza, dying at the foot of Lebanon, saw Me although I was far away and she did not yet know Me and from where I was I brought her back to the poor life of this world. Believe Me, on the day of My death she will regret having survived!... But for you, the joy of My heart during this second year of My teaching, I will do more. I will come to take you to peace, and I will entrust to you the mission to say to those who are waiting: “The hour of the Lord has come. As springtime is coming to the earth, so the springtime of Paradise is rising for us.” But that will not be the only time I will come... I will come... you will perceive Me... always... I can and I will do it. You will have the Master within you, as you do not have Me even now. Because Love can be communicated to its beloved ones, and so sensitively as to touch not only their spirits, but also their senses. Are you more tranquil now, John?»

«Yes, my Lord. But how sorrowful!»

«However, you are not rebelling...»

«Rebel? Never! I would lose You completely. I say “my” Our Father: Thy will be done.»

«I knew that you would understand Me...» He kisses John's cheeks, still wet with continuous although calmer tears.

«Will You let me say goodbye to the boy?... That is another grief... I was fond of him...» he weeps bitterly again...

«Yes. I will call him at once... And I will call Syntyche also. She will suffer, too. You must help her, you, a man...»

«Yes, my Lord.»

Jesus goes out while John weeps and kisses and caresses the walls and

furnishings of the little hospitable room.

Mary and Marjiam come in together.

«Oh! Mother! Did You hear? Did You know?»

«I knew. And I was sorry... But I also parted with Jesus... And I am His Mother...»

«That is true!... Marjiam, come here. Do you know that I am going away and we shall not see each other again?...» He wants to be brave. But he takes the boy in his arms, he sits on the edge of the bed and weeps on the dark-haired head of Marjiam, who imitates him at once.

Jesus enters with Syntyche, who asks: «Why so much weeping, John?»

«He is sending us away, do you not know? Have you not been told yet? He is sending us to Antioch!»

«Well? Did He not say that where there are two people assembled in His name, He will be among them? Come on, John! So far, perhaps, you have chosen your lot yourself, and thus the imposition of another will, even if a loving one, frightens you. I... I am accustomed to accepting the fate imposed on me by other people. And what a destiny!... So I now willingly submit to this new fate. Why not? I did not rebel against despotic slavery, except when it wanted to rule over my soul. And should I now rebel against this sweet slavery of love, which does not injure but elevates our souls and bestows on us the honour of being His servants? Are you afraid of tomorrow because you are not well? I will work for you. Are you afraid of being left alone? But I will never leave you. Be sure of that. I have no other aim in life but to love God and my neighbour. And you are the neighbour whom God entrusts to me. Consider, therefore, whether you are dear to me!»

«You need not work to live, because you will be in Lazarus' house. But I advise you to make use of teaching as a means of approaching people. You, John, as a teacher, and you, Syntyche, with needlework. It will be useful to your apostolate and will give an aim to your daily life.»

«It will be done, Lord» replies Syntyche resolutely.

John is still holding the boy in his arms and is weeping quietly. Marjiam is caressing him... «Will you remember me?»

«I will, John, always, and I will pray for you... Nay... Wait a moment...» He runs out.

Syntyche asks: «How shall we go to Antioch?»

«By sea. Are you afraid?»

«No, Lord. In any case, You are sending us, and that will protect us.»

«You will go with the two Simons, My brothers, Zebedee's sons, Andrew and Matthew. From here to Ptolemais you will go by cart, in which we shall put the chests and a loom which I made for you, Syntyche, with some articles which will be useful to John...»

«I imagined something when I saw the chests and the garments. And I prepared my soul for the separation. It was too beautiful to live here!...» a stifled sob breaks Syntyche's voice. But she collects herself to support John's courage. She asks in a firm voice: «When are we leaving?»

«As soon as the apostles come, tomorrow probably.»

«Well, if You do not mind, I will go and pack the garments in the chests... Give me your rolls, John.» I think that Syntyche is anxious to be alone so that she may weep...

John replies: «Take them... but give me that roll tied with a blue ribbon.»

Marjiam comes in with his jar of honey. «Here, John, take it. You will eat it in my place...»

«No, my child! Why?»

«Because Jesus has said that a spoonful of honey offered as a sacrifice can give peace and hope to an afflicted soul. You are afflicted... I am giving you all the honey that you may be completely comforted.»

«But it is too big a sacrifice for you, boy.»

«Oh! no! In Jesus' prayer we say: "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." This jar was a temptation to me... and might have been an evil because it might have made me infringe my vow. Now I will not see it any more... and it is easier... and I am sure that God will help you, because of this new sacrifice. But do not weep any more. And you, too, Syntyche...»

In fact the Greek woman is now weeping, noiselessly, while taking John's rolls.

And Marjiam caresses them in turn, with a keen desire to weep himself. Syntyche goes out laden with rolls and Mary follows her with the jar of honey.

John is left with Jesus, Who is sat beside him, and with the boy in his arms. He is calm, but depressed.

«Put your last writing in the roll» suggests Jesus. «I think that you want to give it to Marjiam...»

«Yes... I have a copy for myself... Here, boy. These are the words of the Master. The words He spoke when you were not here and others as well... I wanted to continue copying them for you, because you have a whole life in front of you... and goodness knows how much you will evangelize... But I cannot do it any more... Now it is I who will be left without His words...» And he begins to weep bitterly once again.

Marjiam is kind and virile in his new gesture. He throws his arms round John's neck and says: «I will write them for you now and I will send them to you... Is that right, Master? It can be done, can it not?»

«Of course it can. And it will be great charity to do so.»

«I will do it. And when I am not there, Simon Zealot will do it. He loves me and he loves you and he will do it out of charity. So do not weep any more. And I will come to see you... You will certainly not go very far...»

«Oh! how far! Hundreds of miles... And I will die soon.» The boy is disappointed and down-hearted. But he collects himself with the beautiful serenity of a child who thinks everything is easy. «If you can go there, so I can come with my father. And... we will write to each other. When one reads the holy scriptures, it is like being with God, isn't it? So when we read a letter, it is like being with the person we love and who wrote it. Come on, let us go into the next room, come with me...»

«Yes, let us go, John. My brothers will soon be here with the Zealot. I sent for them.»

«Do they know?»

«Not yet. I am waiting to tell them until they are all here...»

«All right, my Lord. Let us go...»

The old man who leaves Joseph's room is really bent with age. And he seems to

be saying goodbye to every stem, to every trunk, to the fountain and the grotto, while going towards the workshop where Mary and Syntyche are silently laying things and garments in the chests...

And Simon, Judas and James find them thus... silent and sad. They watch them... but ask no questions and I wonder whether they realise the truth.

Jesus says:

«To give the readers a clear indication, I had indicated the place of John's prison expiation, with the name now in use. Someone is objecting to this. So I will now clarify the matter: Bithynia and Mysia, for those who want the ancient names. But this is the Gospel for simple people and little ones, not for doctors, to the majority of whom it is unacceptable and useless. And simple people' and the little ones understand "Anatolia" better than "Bithynia or Mysia". Is that not right, little John, who are weeping over John of Endor's grief? But there are so many Johns of Endor in the world! They are the forlorn brothers for whom I made you suffer last year. Rest now, little John, as you will never be sent far away from the Master, nay you will be closer and closer to Him.

And the second year of preaching and public life ends thus: the year of Mercy... And I can but repeat the lamentation dictated at the closing of the first year. But it does not implicate My mouthpiece, who continues her work struggling against all kinds of obstacles. It is not really the "great" people but the "little" ones who proceed along the paths of heroism, levelling them through their sacrifices, also for those who are weighed down by too many things. The "little" ones, that is those who are simple, meek, pure in their hearts and intellects: "little children". And I say to you, o little children, and to you, Romualdo, and to you, Mary, and to all those who are like you: "Come to Me to hear again and always the Word Who speaks to you because He loves you and He speaks to you to bless you. My peace be with you."»

312. The Beginning of the Third Year at Nazareth, while preparing for Departure.

29th October 1945.

John, James, Matthew and Andrew have already arrived in Nazareth and while waiting for Peter, they are walking round the kitchen garden, playing with Marjiam or talking among themselves. I do not see anybody else, as if Jesus were not in the house and Mary were busy. As there is smoke coming from the stone-oven chimney, I would say that She is in there baking bread.

The four apostles are glad to be in the Master's house and they show their joy. Marjiam says to them three times: «Do not laugh like that!». His third warning draws the attention of Matthew, who asks: «Why, boy? Are we not right in being happy here? You have enjoyed this place, eh? We are enjoying it now» and fillips him fondly on the cheek. Marjiam looks at him very seriously, but he does not reply.

Jesus comes in with His cousins Judas and James, who greet their companions with much affection: they have been separated from them for many days. Mary of Alphaeus, flushed and covered with flour, looks out from the stone-oven and smiles at her big boys.

The last to arrive is the Zealot, who says: «I have done everything, Master. Simon will be here shortly.»

«Which Simon? My brother or Simon of Jonah?»

«Your brother, James. He is coming with the whole family to greet you.»

In fact a few minutes later, knocking at the door and noisy chattering announce the arrival of the family of Simon of Alphaeus, who is the first to enter holding by the hand a little boy about eight years old; behind him there is Salome, surrounded by her group of children. Mary of Alphaeus runs out of the stone-oven and kisses her grandchildren and is very happy to see them there.

«So, are You leaving again?» asks Simon while his children make friends with Marjiam who, I think, is familiar only with Alphaeus, the boy who has been cured.

«Yes. It is time.»

«You will still have wet weather.»

«It does not matter. Springtime is approaching day by day.»

«Are You going to Capernaum?»

«I will certainly go there as well. But not at once. I am now going round Galilee and beyond it.»

«I will come to see You when I hear that You are in Capernaum. And I will bring Your Mother and mine to You.»

«I will be grateful to you. For the time being, do not neglect Her. She will be all alone. Bring your children here. They will not become corrupted here, you may be sure of that...»

Simon blushes at Jesus' allusion to his past thoughts and because of an expressive look cast at him by his wife, who seems to be saying: «Do you hear that? It serves you right.» But Simon changes the subject saying: «Where is Your Mother?»

«She is baking bread. She will soon be here...»

Simon's children, however, wait no longer and they go to the stone-oven following their grandmother. And a little girl, not much taller than Alphaeus, the boy who had been cured, comes out almost immediately saying: «Mary is weeping. Why? Eh! Jesus? Why is Your Mother weeping?»

«Is She weeping? Oh! dear! Let me go to Her» says Salome solicitously.

And Jesus explains: «She is weeping because I am going away... But you will come and keep Her company, will you not? She will teach you how to embroider and you will make Her happy. Will you promise Me?»

«I will come, too, now that my father lets me come» says Alphaeus eating a hot bun which has just been given to him.

But although the bun is so hot that he can hardly hold it with his fingers, I think it is ice-cold compared to the heat suffered by Simon of Alphaeus, who blushes with shame at the words of his little boy. Although it is a rather cold winter morning, with a northern breeze blowing away the clouds in the sky and making one's skin tingle, Simon is sweating profusely, as if it were summer time...

But Jesus pretends not to notice it and the apostles pretend they are interested in what Simon's children are saying, and so the incident is over, and Simon can collect himself and ask Jesus why all the apostles are not there.

«Simon of Jonah is about to arrive. The others will join Me at the right moment. It has all been settled.»

«All of them?»

«Yes.»

«Also Judas of Kerieth?»

«Yes...»

«Jesus, come with me for a moment» begs His cousin Simon. And once they have moved away, towards the end of the kitchen garden, Simon asks: «But do You really know who is Judas of Simon?»

«He is an Israelite. Nothing more, nothing less.»

«Oh! You are not going to tell me...» he is on the point of getting excited and raising his voice.

But Jesus calms him, interrupting him and laying a hand on his shoulder, saying: «He is what prevailing ideas and those who approach him, have made him. Because, for instance, if he had found an upright soul and an intelligent mind in everybody here (and He lays stress on the words) he would not have been anxious to sin. But he did not find them. On the contrary, he found an entirely human element to which he adapted most comfortably his very human ego, which dreams and works for Me and sees in Me the king of Israel, in the human meaning of the word, as you dream and would like to see Me, and for Whom you would feel inclined to work, and your brother Joseph with you, as well as Levi, the head of the synagogue in Nazareth, and Mattathias and Simon and Matthias and Benjamin, and Jacob and, with the exception of three or four people, everybody in Nazareth. And not only in Nazareth... He has difficulty in perfecting himself, because you all contribute to his perversion. He is the weakest of My apostles. But for the time being, he is but a weak apostle. His impulses are good, his intentions are honest and he loves Me. He loves Me in a devious way, but it is still love. You do not help him to separate these good qualities from the bad ones that form his ego, on the contrary you aggravate them by adding to them your own incredulity and human limitations... But let us go home. The others have gone there ahead of us...»

Simon follows Him and looks a little humiliated. They are almost on the threshold when he holds back Jesus and says: «Brother, are You angry with

me?»

«No, I am not. But I am endeavouring to perfect you as I do with all the other disciples. Did you not say that you want to be one?»

«Yes, Jesus. But in the past You did not speak thus, not even when You were reproaching... You were kinder...»

«And of what avail was it? I was kinder once. I have been so for two years... Everybody here has become loose resting on My patience and kindness or has sharpened teeth and nails... You have all taken advantage of My love, to harm Me. Is it not so?...»

«Yes, it is. It is true. So, will You no longer be good?»

«I will be just. And even so, I shall be such as you do not deserve, you people of Israel, who will not acknowledge Me as the promised Messiah.»

They go into the little room that is so crowded with people, that the apostles had to move into the kitchen and into Joseph's workshop, with the exception of Alphaeus' two sons, who have remained with their mother and sister-in-law. The latter are joined by Mary, Who comes in holding little Alphaeus by the hand. Mary's face shows clear signs of weeping.

While She is about to reply to Simon, who assures Her that he will come to see Her every day, a cart is proceeding along the little street with such a clanging of harness bells that it draws the attention of Alphaeus' children and the door is opened at the same time as they hear knocking outside. Simon Peter's merry face appears: he is still sitting on the cart, knocking at the door with the handle of the whip... Beside him, shy but smiling, there is Porphirea, sitting on cases and boxes, as on a throne.

Marjiam runs out and climbs on the cart to greet his adoptive mother. The others also come out, including Jesus.

«Master, here I am. I brought my wife, on this cart, as she is not fit for long walks. Mary, may the Lord be with You. And with you, Mary of Alphaeus.» He looks at everybody while getting off the vehicle and helps his wife to get off, and greets them all together.

They would like to help him unload the cart. But he objects resolutely. «Later, later» he says, and without ceremony, he goes to the large door of Joseph's workshop and opens it wide, endeavouring to take the cart in, as it is. But it

cannot go in, of course. However the manoeuvre helps to distract the attention of the guests and make them understand that they are not wanted... And in fact Simon of Alphaeus takes leave with all his family... “

«Oh! now that we are, by ourselves, let us attend to our business...» says Simon of Jonah, driving back the donkey, which is making a dreadful noise, covered as it is with harness-bells, so much so that James of Zebedee cannot help laughing and asks: «Where did you find it, harnessed like that?»

But Peter is busy taking the cases from the cart and handing them to John and Andrew, who expect to feel them heavy and are surprised because they are light, and they say so...

«Run into the kitchen garden and do not behave like frightened sparrows» orders Peter, getting off the cart with a little case that is really heavy, and is placed in a corner in the little room.

«And now the donkey and the cart. The donkey and the cart? Yes... That is the problem!... And yet we must put everything inside...»

«Through the kitchen garden, Simon» says Mary in a low voice. «There is an opening in the fence, at the end. You cannot see it, because it is covered by branches... But it is there. Follow the path along the house, between the house and our neighbour's kitchen garden, and I will come and show you where the passage is... Who is coming to remove the bramble covering it?»

«I am... I am...» They all run to the end of the kitchen garden while Peter goes away with his noisy equipage and Mary of Alphaeus closes the door... With a sickle they clear the rustic railing and open a passage through which the donkey and cart come in.

«Oh! Well! And now let us take all this away. They have deafened me!» and Peter hastens to cut the strings which fasten the bells to the harness.

«Why did you leave them on, then?» asks Andrew.

«So that everyone in Nazareth could hear me arrive. And it was a success... I am now taking them off, so that no one in Nazareth may hear us depart. And that is why I loaded the cart with empty cases... We will leave with full ones and no one, should anybody see us, will be surprised seeing a woman sitting beside me on the cases. Our friend, the one who is far away from us just now, boasts that he has a good practical sense. But I have it, too, when I want...»

«Excuse me, brother. Why is all this necessary?» asks Andrew who has watered the donkey and taken it to the rustic wood-store near the stone-oven.

«Why? Don't you know?... Master, do they not know yet?»

«No, Simon. I was waiting for you. Come into the workshop, all of you. The women are all right where they are. You did the right thing in doing what you did, Simon of Jonah.»

They go into the workshop, while Porphirea with the boy and the two Maries remain in the house.

«I wanted you here, because you must help Me to send John and Syntyche away, very far away. I decided so at the Feast of the Tabernacles. You have clearly seen that it was not possible to keep them with us, neither can we keep them here, without risking their peace. As usual, Lazarus of Bethany is helping Me in this plan. They have already been informed. Simon Peter was told a few days ago. You are being informed now. We are leaving Nazareth tonight, even if it should rain or be windy instead of moonlight of the first quarter. We should have already left. But I suppose that Simon of Jonah must have had difficulties in finding transport...»

«I did, indeed! I was almost giving up hope. But at long last I got it from a slimy Greek in Tiberias... And it will be useful...»

«Yes, it will be very useful, particularly for John of Endor.»

«Where is he? I have not seen him» asks Peter.

«In his room with Syntyche.»

«And... how did he take it?» asks Peter again.

«Very sorrowfully. Also the woman...»

«And You as well, Master. Your forehead is furrowed with a wrinkle, which was not there before, and Your eyes are sad and severe» remarks John.

«It is true. I am deeply grieved... But let us speak of what we have to do. Listen to Me carefully, because we shall have to part. We will leave this evening, half way through the first watch. We shall leave like people who run away... because they are guilty. But we are not going away to do anything wrong, neither are we escaping because we have done it. We are going away to prevent other people from harming those who would not be strong enough to bear it. So we are

leaving... We will go via Sephoris... We will stop in a house half-way and then leave at dawn. It is a house with many porches for animals. There are shepherds there who are friends of Isaac. I know them. They will give Me hospitality without asking any questions. Then we must reach Jiphthahel by evening and rest there. Do you think the donkey will be able to do it?»

«Certainly That crafty Greek made me pay for it, but he gave me a good strong animal.»

«Very good. The following morning we will go to Ptolemais, and we will part there. Under the guidance of Peter, who is your head, and whom you must obey unconditionally, you will go to Tyre by sea. You will find a ship there sailing to Antioch. You will go on board and give this letter to the owner of the ship. The letter is from Lazarus of Theophilus. You will be believed to be his servants, sent to his land at Antioch, or rather to his garden at Antigonea. And you are to be such for everybody. Be careful, serious, wise and quiet. When you arrive at Antioch, go at once to Philip, Lazarus' steward, and give him this letter...»

«Master, he knows me» says the Zealot.

«Very well.»

«But how can he believe that I am a servant?»

«In the case of Philip it is not necessary. He knows that he has to receive and give hospitality to two friends of Lazarus' and help them in every way. That is written in the letter. You have taken them there. Nothing else. He calls you: "his dear friends from Palestine". And that is what you are, united by faith and by the action that you are accomplishing. You will rest there until the ship sails again for Tyre after the unloading and loading operations are completed. From Tyre you will come by boat to Ptolemais and join Me at Achzib...»

«Why do You not come with us, Lord?» asks John with a sigh.

«Because I am staying to pray for you, and particularly for those two poor people. I am staying to pray. And My third year of public life begins. It begins with a very sad departure; like the first and second ones. It begins with a great prayer and penance, as the first one did... Because this year has the sorrowful hardships of the first year, and even more. I was then preparing to convert the world. I am now preparing for a wider and more powerful action. But listen to Me carefully and bear in mind that if in the first year I was the Man-Master, the Wise Man Who invites to Wisdom with perfect humanity and intellectual

perfection, and in the second I was the Saviour and Friend, the Merciful Master Who passes by receiving, forgiving, pitying, bearing, in the third year I will be the Redeemer God and King, the Just Man. Do not, therefore, be surprised if you see new aspects of Me, and if in the Lamb you see flashes of Strength. What has Israel replied to My invitation of love, to My opening My arms saying: "Come: I love and forgive"? It replied with its ever growing deliberate dullness and hardheartedness, with falsehood and deceit. Let it be so. I called every class of Israel, bowing My head to the dust. They spat on Holiness that humbled itself. I invited them to become holy. They replied by becoming demons. I did My duty in everything. They called My duty "sin". I was silent. They called My silence a proof of guilt. I spoke. They called My word blasphemy. Enough of that, now! They gave Me no peace. They granted Me no joy. And My joy consisted in bringing up in the life of the spirit the new-born to Grace. They lie in wait for them, and I have to tear them from My chest, causing them and Myself the grief of parents and children torn from one another, in order to save them from evil-minded Israel. They, the mighty ones in Israel, who call themselves "sanctifiers" and boast of being so, prevent Me, would like to prevent Me from saving souls and from taking delight in those I have saved. I have now had for many months Levi, a publican, as a friend and at My service, and the world can see whether Matthew is scandal or emulation. But the charge stands. And it will stand for Mary of Lazarus and for all the others I will save. That is enough! I will go My way, which is more and more difficult and wet with tears... I am going... Not one of My tears will fall in vain. They cry to My Father... And later... a much more powerful humour will cry. I am going... Let those who love Me follow Me and be virile, because the severe hour is coming. I Will not stop. Nothing will stop Me. Neither will they stop... But woe betide them! Woe to them! Woe to those for whom Love becomes Justice!... *The sign of the new time will be of severe Justice for all those who are obstinate in their sin against the words of the Lord and the action of the Word of the Lord!...*»

Jesus seems a punishing archangel. His eyes are so bright that I would say that they are like flames against the smoky wall... Even His voice seems to be bright, as it has shrill tones of bronze and silver struck violently.

The eight apostles have turned pale and have almost become smaller for fear. Jesus looks at them... full of pity and love. He says: «I am not referring to you, My friends. These threats are not for you. You are My apostles and I chose you.» His voice has become kind and deep. He concludes: «Let us go into the house. Let us make the two persecuted disciples feel that we love them more

than ourselves, and I would remind you that they believe they are leaving to prepare My way in Antioch. Come...»

313. Departure from Nazareth.

30th October 1945.

It is evening. Another farewell evening for the little house in Nazareth and its inhabitants. Another supper during which grief makes people silent and unwilling to eat. Jesus, John, Syntyche, Peter, John, Simon and Matthew are sitting at the table. It was not possible for the others to sit there. The table in Nazareth is so small! It was made just for a small family of honest people, who at most can invite to sit at it a pilgrim or an afflicted person to give them refreshment of love rather than of food! Marjiam might have been able to sit at it tonight, as he is a very thin boy and takes up little room... But Marjiam is very serious and silent and is eating in a corner, sitting on a little stool at the feet of Porphirea, whom Mary has sat on the seat of Her loom and who, meek and reserved as she is, is eating the food which they have given her, looking with eyes full of pity at the two about to depart, who endeavour to swallow their food with lowered heads to conceal their faces reddened by weeping. The others, that is, the two sons of Alphaeus, Andrew and James of Zebedee have settled in the kitchen, near a kind of kneading trough. But they can be seen through the open door.

The Blessed Virgin and Mary of Alphaeus come and go serving this one and that one, with motherly care although they are worried and sad. And if the Blessed Virgin caresses with Her smile, so sad this evening, those whom She approaches, Mary of Alphaeus, less reserved and more informal, adds actions and words to her smiles, and more than once she encourages with a caress or a kiss, according to whoever benefits by it, this one or that one to take the food most suitable to their needs and in consideration of the imminent journey. I think that out of loving pity for John, who is exhausted and has become even thinner during the days of expectation, she would give herself as food to him, so anxious she is to convince him he should eat this or that dish, the flavour and beneficial properties of which she praises. But notwithstanding her... enticement, the food remains almost intact on John's plate and Mary of Alphaeus is distressed like a mother who sees her unweaned babe refuse her breast.

«But you cannot leave like that, son!» she exclaims. And in her motherly love she does not consider that John is about her own age and that the name «son» is not appropriate. But she sees in him only a suffering human being and thus does not find any other name to comfort him... «It will do you no good to travel on an empty stomach, on that shaking cart, in the cold dampness of the night. And then! Goodness knows what you will eat during the dreadful long journey!... Eternal mercy! At sea for so many miles! I would be frightened to death. And along Phoenician coasts and later!... even worse! And the owner of the ship will certainly be a Philistine, or a Phoenician or from some other hellish country... and will have no mercy on you... So, while you are still close to a mother who loves you, eat!... a little bit of this exquisite fish. Just to please Simon of Jonah who prepared it at Bethsaida with so much love and taught me how to cook it for you and Jesus, so that it may nourish you. You definitely do not want it?... Well... Oh! You will eat this!»... and she runs into the kitchen and comes back with a tureen full of a steaming pudding. I do not know what it is... It is certainly a kind of flour or corn mashed with milk: «Look, I made this because I remembered that one day you spoke of it as a sweet remembrance of your childhood... It is good and will do you good. Come on, just a little.»

John lets her put some spoonfuls of the soft meal in his plate and tries to swallow it, but tears stream down his face adding their salt to the food, while he lowers his head even more towards his plate.

All the others do ample justice to the dish, which is perhaps exquisite. Their faces have brightened up in seeing it and Marjiam has stood up... but then he felt that he had to ask the Blessed Virgin: «May I eat some? It wants five days to the end of my vow...»

«Yes, son. You may have some» says Mary caressing him.

But the boy is still uncertain and Mary, to appease the scruple of the little disciple, asks Her Son: «Jesus, Marjiam wants to know whether he can eat the pudding of barley meal... because of the honey which makes it a sweet dish, You know...»

«Of course you can, Marjiam. I dispense you this evening from your sacrifice, providing John eats his honey pudding as well. See how keen the boy is to have it? Help him, so that he may have some» and Jesus, Who is near John, takes his hand and holds it while John obediently strives to finish his helping.

Mary of Alphaeus is now happier. And she makes a fresh assault with a lovely

dish of steaming pears, baked in the oven. She comes back in from the kitchen garden with her tray and says: «It's raining. It has just begun. What a nuisance!»

«No! On the contrary! There will be no one in the streets. It is always sad to say goodbye when one leaves... It is better to go away sailing before the wind, without running into sandbanks or rocks which make one stop or slow down. And curious people are just like sandbanks and rocks...» says Peter who sees sails and sailing in every action.

«Thank you, Mary. But I do not want anything else» says John in an attempt to refuse fruit.

«Ah! Not these! Mary cooked them. Are you going to despise the food that She prepared? Look how well She prepared them! With spices in the little cavity... dressed with butter... They are food fit for a king. A julep. She got brown Herself standing near the fire to glaze them like that. And they are good for your throat and your cough... They warm and cure you. Mary, tell him how they helped my Alphaeus when he was ill. But he wanted You to cook them. Of course! Your hands are holy and bestow health!... The food that You prepare is blessed indeed!... My Alphaeus was calmer after eating Your pears... he breathed more freely... My poor husband!...» and Mary takes advantage of her recollection to be able to weep at last and to go out to weep. Perhaps I am evil-minded, but I do not think that Mary would have shed a tear for her «poor Alphaeus» that evening, had she not felt pity for the two who were about to leave... Mary of Alphaeus was so deeply grieved for John and Syntyche and so distressed at the departure of Jesus, James and Judas, that she burst into tears in order not to suffocate.

Mary now replaces her and lays a hand on the shoulder of Syntyche, who is sitting opposite Jesus, between Simon and Matthew. «Come on. Eat up. Are you going to leave and let Me worry also because you have gone away on almost empty stomachs?»

«I have eaten, Mother» says Syntyche looking up and showing her tired face marked by several days' weeping. She then lowers her head towards her shoulder, on which Mary's hand is resting, and rubs her cheek on the little hand to be caressed. With Her other hand Mary caresses her hair and draws towards Herself the head of Syntyche, whose face now rests on Her breast.

«Eat, John. It will really do you good. You must not get cold. Simon of Jonah, you will see that every evening he has some hot milk with honey, or at least

some hot water and honey. Remember that.»

«I will see to that, as well, Mother. You may rest assured» says Syntyche.

«I am sure in fact. But you will do that when you are settled in Antioch. Simon of Jonah will see to it, for the time being. And remember, Simon, to give him much olive oil. That is why I gave you the little oil jar. Watch that it does not get broken. And if you see that he has difficulty in breathing, do as I told you, using the other little vase of balm. Take enough of it to rub his chest, shoulders and kidneys. Warm it first so that you can touch it without burning yourself, then rub it on and cover him immediately with the woollen bands I gave you. I prepared the balm for that special purpose. And you, Syntyche, remember its composition, so that you can make more. You will always be able to find lilies, camphor, dittany, resin and cloves with laurel, artemisia and the rest. I hear that Lazarus has gardens of essence plants at Antigonea.»

«And they are wonderful» says the Zealot who has seen them. And he adds: «I do not want to advise anything. But I say that that place should be more healthy for John, both for his spirit and his body, than Antioch. It is sheltered from winds, light air comes from thickets of resin plants on the slopes of a little hill, which protects from sea winds but allows benign sea salts to spread there, it is serene and quiet and yet cheerful because of the large variety of flowers and birds that live there in peace... You will see yourselves what suits you best. Syntyche is so sensible! It is better to rely upon women in certain matters. Is it not?»

«In fact I entrust My John just to Syntyche's good sense and kind heart» says Jesus.

«And so do I» says John of Endor. «I... I... I have no more vigour... and... I will never be of any use...»

«Do not say that, John! When autumn strips trees of their leaves, it does not mean that they are already inert. On the contrary they work with concealed energy to prepare the triumph of the next fructification. It is the same with you. You have been stripped by the cold wind of your pain. But in actual fact in the depths of your soul you are already working for new ministries. Your very grief will be a spur to be active. I am sure of that. And then you, always you, will be the one to help me, a poor woman, who has still so much to learn to become something of Jesus.»

«Oh! What do you expect me to be?! There is nothing I can do... I am a done man!»

«No. It is not right to say that! Only a dying man can say: "I am a finished man." Nobody else. Do you think that you have nothing else to do? You still have to do what you told me one day: to complete the sacrifice. How can you, but by suffering? It is silly, John, to quote wise authors to you, a school master, but I would remind you of Gorgias of Leontina (or Leontine). He taught that one does not expiate, in this life or in the next one, but through sorrow and suffering. And I would remind you also of our great Socrates: "To disobey who is above us, be it god or a man, is evil and shameful." Now, if it was right to do so for an unjust judgement, passed by unjust men, what will it be if done by order of the most holy Man and of our God? Obedience is a great thing, simply because it is obedience. So, most great is the obedience to a holy order, which I consider, and you must consider with me, a great mercy. You always say that your life is approaching its end and that you do not yet feel that you have cancelled your debt with Justice. So why do you not consider this deep grief as a means of cancelling your debt, and do so in the short time you still have? A great grief to achieve a great peace! Believe me, it is worth suffering it. The only important thing in life is to have conquered Virtue when we arrive at the hour of our death.»

«You encourage me, Syntyche... Please always do so.»

«I will. I promise you here. But comply with me, as a man and as a Christian.»

The meal is over. Mary collects the pears which have been left and puts them in a vase, which She hands to Andrew, who goes out and comes back in saying: «It is raining harder and harder. I would say that it is better...»

«Yes. It is always an agony to wait. I am going at once to prepare the donkey. And you can come as well, with the chests and everything else. You, too, Porphirea. Quick! You are so patient that even the donkey is subdued and allows you to dress it (he says exactly that) without reacting. Afterwards Andrew will do it, as he is like you. Quick, all of you!» And Peter pushes everybody, with the exception of Mary, Jesus, John of Endor and Syntyche, out of the room and the kitchen.

«Master! Oh! Master, help me! The hour has come... and I feel that my heart is breaking! It has really come! Oh! why, good Jesus, did You not let me die here, after I had received the dreadful news of my sentence and I had striven to accept

it?!» And John collapses on Jesus' chest, weeping distressingly.

Mary and Syntyche endeavour to calm him, and Mary, although always so reserved, detaches him from Jesus, embracing and calling him: «My dear son, My darling son»...

Syntyche in the meantime kneels at Jesus' feet saying: «Bless me, consecrate me, that I may be fortified. Lord, Saviour and King, I, here, in the presence of Your Mother, swear and profess that I will follow Your doctrine and serve You until I breathe my last. I swear and profess that I will devote myself to Your doctrine and its followers for Your sake, my Master and Saviour. I swear and profess that there will be no other purpose in my life and that everything that is world and flesh is definitely dead, as far as I am concerned, whilst, with the help of God and of the prayers of Your Mother, I hope to defeat the Demon so that he may not lead me into error and I may not be condemned at the hour of Your Judgement. I swear and profess that allurements and threats will not bend me and I will remember everything, unless God allows otherwise. But I hope in Him and I believe in His bounty, whereby I am sure that He will not leave me at the mercy of obscure powers, stronger than my own. Consecrate Your servant, o Lord, that she may be protected from the snares of every enemy.»

Jesus lays His hands on her head, as also priests do, and prays over her.

Mary leads John beside Syntyche and makes him kneel saying: «Bless this one, too, Son, that he may serve You with holiness and peace.»

And Jesus repeats the gesture on the lowered head of poor John. He then lifts him and makes Syntyche stand up, and putting their hands in the hands of Mary He says: «And let Her be the last one to caress you here» and He goes out quickly, I do not know where.

«Mother, goodbye! I will never forget these days» moans John.

«Neither will I forget you, dear son.»

«I, too, Mother... Goodbye. Let me kiss You once more... Oh! after so many years I had satisfied my desire for maternal kisses!... But no longer now...» Syntyche weeps in the arms of Mary Who kisses her.

John sobs unreservedly. Mary embraces him also, She now has both of them in Her arms, the true Mother of Christians, and with Her most pure lips She touches John's wrinkled face lightly: a chaste, but so loving kiss. And with Her

kiss there are tears of the Blessed Virgin on the emaciated cheek...

Peter comes in: «It's ready. Come on...» and he cannot say anything else because he is deeply moved.

Marjiam, who follows his father like a shadow, clings on to Syntyche's neck and kisses her, he then embraces John and kisses him repeatedly... But he is weeping as well.

They go out. Mary is holding Syntyche by the hand, and John has taken Marjiam's.

«Our mantles...» says Syntyche and she makes the gesture of going back to the house.

«They are here. Quick, take them...» Peter feigns coarseness as he does not want to show that he is moved, but with the back of his hand he wipes off his tears standing behind the two who are enveloping themselves in their mantles.

Over there, beyond the hedge, the little swinging lamp of the cart gives a yellowish light in the dark air... The rain rustles among the olive leaves and resounds in the fountain full of water... A dove, awakened by the light of the lamps, which the apostles are shielding under their mantles, holding them low to illuminate the paths full of puddles, is cooing lamentingly...

Jesus is already near the cart over which a blanket has been spread to act as a roof.

«Come on, quick, it's raining hard!» urges Peter. And while James of Zebedee replaces Porphirea at the bridle, Peter, without ceremony, lifts Syntyche off the ground and puts her on the cart, and with greater speed he grasps John of Endor and throws him on. He gets on himself and gives the poor donkey such a strong blow with the whip, that it bounces forward almost running over James. And Peter insists until they are on the main road, a good distance from houses... A last farewell cry reaches the persons who are leaving and who weep unreservedly...

Peter stops the donkey outside Nazareth, waiting for Jesus and the others, who soon join him walking fast in the increasing rain.

They take a road among the vegetable gardens, to go again to the north of the town, without crossing it. But Nazareth is dark and asleep in the ice-cold rain of a winter night... and I think that the noise of the donkey's hooves, hardly audible

on the wet beaten ground, cannot be heard even by those who are awake...

The group proceeds in dead silence. Only the sobs of the two can be heard, mingled with the sound of rain on olive leaves.

314. Towards Jiphthahel.

31st October 1945.

It must have rained all night. But at dawn a dry wind has blown the clouds southwards, beyond the hills of Nazareth. Thus a timid winter sun dares to peep out and light with its beam a diamond on every olive leaf. But they are gala dresses which the olive-trees soon lose, because the wind shakes them off the leaves, which seem to be weeping diamond chips, which get lost among the dewy grass or on the muddy road.

Peter is preparing the cart and donkey with the help of James and Andrew. The others have not appeared as yet. But they soon come out, one after the other, from a kitchen, probably, because they say to the three who are outside: «You can go now and have something to eat.» And they go and come out shortly afterwards with Jesus.

«I have put the cover on again because of the wind» explains Peter. «If You really want to go to Jiphthahel, we shall have it in our faces... and it will be biting. I do not understand why we do not take the direct road to Sicaminon and then the one along the coast... It is longer but not so hard. Did You hear what the shepherd said, the man I encouraged to speak? He said: “Jotopata in the winter months is isolated. There is only one road to go there, but it is not possible to go there with lambs... You cannot carry anything on your shoulders because there are passes where you proceed more with your hands than with your feet, and lambs cannot swim. There are two rivers, which are often in flood, and the very road is a torrent that flows on a rocky bed. I go there after the Tabernacles and in full spring, and I do good business, because they buy supplies for months.” That is what he said... And we... with this thing... (and he kicks the wheel of the cart)... and with this donkey... bah!...»

«The direct road from Sephoris to Sicaminon is better. But it is very busy.

Remember that we must not leave traces of John...»

«The Master is right. And we may find Isaac with some disciples... At Sicaminon in any case!...» says the Zealot.

«Let us go then...»

«I am going to call those two...» says Andrew.

And while he does so, Jesus takes leave of an old woman and a boy who are coming out of a sheepfold with buckets of milk. Also some bearded shepherds arrive and Jesus thanks them for the hospitality given to Him during the rainy night.

John and Syntyche are already in the cart, which sets out along the road, driven by Peter. Jesus with the Zealot and Matthew at His sides, and followed by Andrew, James, John and the two sons of Alphaeus, quickens His step to reach it.

The wind bites their faces and swells their mantles. The cover stretched over the arches of the cart snaps like a sail notwithstanding the rain of the night has made it heavy: «Never mind, it will soon dry!» moans Peter looking at it. «Providing the lungs of that poor man do not dry up!... Wait, Simon of Jonah... This is what you do.» And he stops the donkey, takes his mantle off, gets on the cart and envelops John carefully in it.

«Why? I already have one...»

«Because pulling the donkey I am already as warm as I would be in a bread oven. And I am used to being naked on the boat, particularly when there is a storm. The cold spurs me and I am quicker. Come on, make sure you are well covered. Mary made so many recommendations to me in Nazareth, that if you were taken ill, I would not be able to face Her any longer...»

He gets off the cart, takes the bridle again and spurs the donkey. But he soon has to call his brother and also James to help the donkey get out of a muddy spot in which a wheel had sunk. And they proceed, pushing the cart in turns to help the donkey that digs its strong feet in the mire and draws the cart. The poor animal is panting and puffing with fatigue and greediness because Peter entices it to move on by offering it bits of bread and cores of apples, which, however, he lets it have only when they stop for a moment.

«You are cheating, Simon of Jonah» says Matthew jokingly after watching

Peter's manoeuvring.

«No. I am getting it to do its duty, and I am doing it kindly. If I did not do that, I would have to use the whip. And I do not like that. I do not strike my boat when she is wayward, although she is of wood. Why should I flog the donkey, which is flesh? This is my boat now... it is in water... it is indeed! So I am dealing with it as I deal with my boat. I am not Doras, you know? I wanted to name it Doras, before I bought it. Then I heard its name, and I liked it. So I did not change it...»

«What is its name?» they ask curiously.

«Guess!» and Peter laughs through his beard.

The strangest names are mentioned including those of the fiercest Pharisees and Sadducees etc. etc. But Peter always shakes his head. They give it up.

«Antonius is its name! Isn't it a beautiful name? That cursed Roman! Obviously also the Greek who sold me the donkey must have had a grudge against Antonius!»

They all laugh while John of Endor explains: «He is probably one from whom money was extorted after Caesar's death. Is he old?»

«He is about seventy... and must have done all kinds of jobs... He now owns a hotel at Tiberias...»

They are at the cross-roads of Sephoris with the Nazareth-Ptolemais, Nazareth-Sicaminon, Nazareth-Jotopata roads (I would point out that they pronounce J as a very soft G). On the consular milestone there are the three indications of Ptolemais, Sicaminon, Jotopata.

«Are we going to Sephoris, Master?»

«It is quite useless. Let us go to Jiphthahel, without stopping. We shall eat something while walking. We must be there before evening.»

They proceed and cross two little torrents in flood, and begin to climb the slopes of a range of hills lying south-northwards with a large steep mass to the north stretching eastwards.

«Jiphthahel is over there» says Jesus.

«I cannot see anything» remarks Peter.

«It is to the north. The coast is very steep in our direction, as well as to the east

and the west.»

«So we must go right round all that mountain?»

«No. There is a road at the foot of the highest mountain, in the valley. It is a short cut, but the road is very steep.»

«Have You been there?»

«No. But I know.»

The road is steep indeed! So much so, that when they arrive there, they are frightened. Night seems to fall all at once, so dark it is at the bottom of the valley, which is so horrifying and precipitous that it reminds me of Dantesque Malebolge; it is a road cut in the rock, so steep that it almost ascends in steps, a narrow wild road, enclosed between a furious torrent and an even more rugged mountain side that becomes steeper as one proceeds northwards.

If the light increases little by little as one ascends higher, fatigue also increases, and in fact they unload the cart of personal baggage and Syntyche also gets off to make the cart as light as possible. John of Endor, who after his few words has not opened his mouth but to cough, would like to get off as well. But they do not let him and he remains where he is, while all the others push or pull cart and donkey sweating at each gradient of the road. But no one complains. On the contrary they all pretend to be satisfied with the exercise in order not to embarrass the two disciples for whom they do it and who have more than once expressed their regret for so much work.

The road turns at a right angle, then there is another corner, a shorter one, which ends in a town perched on such a steep slope that, as John of Zebedee says, it seems on the point of sliding down to the valley with all its houses.

«It is, instead, very solid. All one with the rock.»

«Like Ramoth then...» says-Syntyche who remembers the place.

«Even more. The rock here is part of the houses, not just their foundation. It reminds one more of Gamala. Do you remember it?»

«Yes, and we remember those pigs as well...» says Andrew.

«It was from there that we departed to go to Tarichea, the Tabor and Endor...» says Simon Zealot.

«It is my fate to let you have painful recollections and hard work...» says John of Endor with a sigh.

«Never! You have given us faithful friendship and nothing else, my friend» says Judas of Alphaeus impulsively. And everybody joins him to confirm his statement.

«And yet... I have not been loved... No one tells me... But I can meditate and put together various facts, as in a picture. This departure was not foreseen and it was not a spontaneous decision...»

«Why do you say that, John?» asks Jesus kindly, although He is afflicted.

«Because it is true. I was not wanted. I was chosen to go far away, no one else, not even the great disciples.»

«And what about Syntyche, then?» asks James of Alphaeus, grieved at the lucidity of thought of the man of Endor.

«Syntyche is coming so as not to send me away alone... to conceal the truth pitifully...»

«No, John!...»

«Yes, Master. See? I could also tell You the name of my torturer. Do You know where I can read it? Just by looking at these good eight ones I read it! Only by considering the absence of the others I can read it! The one through whom I was found by You is also the one who would like me to be found by Beelzebub. And he drove me to this hour, and he drove You to it, Master, because You suffer as much as I do, perhaps more, and he drove me to this hour to make me fall back into despair and hatred. Because he is bad, cruel, envious. And much more. Judas of Kerioth is the dark soul amongst Your servants, who are all as clear as light...»

«Do not say that, John. He is not the only one missing. They were all away for the Dedication, with the exception of the Zealot, who has no family. One cannot come from Kerioth in this season in a few stages. It is about two hundred miles' walk. And it was fair that he should go and see his mother, like Thomas. I spared also Nathanael, because he is old, and Philip, to give him as a companion to Nathanael...»

«Yes. Three more are absent... But, o good Jesus! You know men's hearts, because You are the Holy One. But You are not the only one to know them!

Also the wicked know the wicked, because they know one another. I was wicked, and I saw myself again, with my worst instincts, in Judas. But I forgive him. For one reason only I forgive him for sending me to die so far away: because it was just through him that I came to You. And may God forgive him for the rest... for all the rest.»

Jesus does not deny... He is silent. The apostles look at one another while pushing the cart on the slippery road.

It is almost night when they reach the town, where unknown amongst unknown people, they put up at a hotel situated on the southern end of the town. It is on the brink of a gorge, which makes one giddy looking down it, as it so steep and deep. At the bottom: a noise and nothing else in the shadow of peace already in the valley, where a torrent roars.

315. Jesus' Farewell to the Two Disciples.

1st November 1945.

It is along the same road, which in any case is the only one in this village that looks like an eagle's nest on a solitary mountain top, that they set out again the following day, tormented by cold wet weather hindering their march. John of Endor also is compelled to get off the cart, because a downhill road is more dangerous than an uphill one, and if the donkey by itself would be in no danger, the weight of the cart, thrust forward by the slope, makes the situation very awkward for the poor animal. The apostles also are in trouble today, as they perspire not pushing but holding back the vehicle, which might crash down causing a disaster or, at least, the loss of the load.

The road is dreadful for about one third of its total length, the last stretch towards the valley. It then forks, and the branch running westwards becomes more comfortable and level. They stop to rest wiping their perspiration and Peter rewards the donkey, which is shaking its ears trembling and panting, obviously engrossed in deep meditation on the painful situation of donkeys and the whims of men who choose certain roads. Apparently Simon of Jonah ascribes to such considerations the thoughtful expression of the animal and to raise its spirits he hangs from its neck a bag of small beans, and while the donkey crushes the hard

food with greedy relish, the men also eat bread and cheese and drink milk of which their little flasks are full.

The meal is over. But Peter wants to water «his Antonius that deserves more honour than Caesar» he says, and taking a bucket from the cart he fetches some water from a torrent flowing towards the sea.

«We can go now... And we would like to trot the donkey because I think that the country is flat beyond that hill... But we cannot. However, we shall proceed fast. Come on, John, and you, woman. Get on and let us go.»

«I am getting on as well, Simon, and I will drive. You will all follow us...» says Jesus as soon as the two are in the cart.

«Why? Are You not well? You look so pale!...»

«No, Simon. I want to speak to them alone...» and He points at the two, who have also turned pale, as they realise that the moment of farewell has come.

«Ah! All right. Get on and we will follow You.»

Jesus sits on the plank used as a seat by the driver and says: «Come here beside Me, John. And you, Syntyche, come near Me...»

John sits on the Lord's left and Syntyche at His feet, almost on the edge of the cart, with her back to the road, and her face raised towards Jesus. In her present position, sitting on her heels, relaxed as if she were burdened by a weight exhausting her, her hands abandoned on her lap and clasped to hold them still, as they were trembling, with her tired face and most beautiful dark violet eyes dimmed by the many tears shed, in the shade of her veil and mantle lowered over her forehead, she seems a desolate Pieta.

Not to mention John!... I think that if his scaffold were at the bottom of the road, he would not be so upset.

The donkey is now ambling and is so obedient and sensible that Jesus is not compelled to keep a close watch on it. And Jesus takes advantage of the situation to drop the reins and take John's hand and lay the other one on Syntyche's head.

«My children, I thank you for all the joy you have given Me. This has been for Me a year strewn with flowers of joy, because I was able to take your souls and hold them in front of Me, to hide the ugly things of the world, to scent the air

corrupted by the sins of the world, to instill kindness into Myself and confirm My hope that My mission is not useless. Marjiam, you, My John, Ermasteus, you, Syntyche, Mary of Lazarus, Alexander Misace and others... The triumphal flowers of the Saviour, Whom only people with upright hearts can perceive as such... Why are you shaking your head, John?»

«Because You are good and You are putting me amongst people with right hearts. But my sin is always present to me...»

«Your sin is the fruit of the flesh stirred by two wicked people. Your heart's righteousness is the substratum of your honest ego, desirous of honest things, but unfortunate because they were taken away from you by death or by wickedness, but even so your ego was not less alive under the burden of so much grief. It was sufficient for the voice of the Saviour to penetrate into the depth of your heart, where your ego was languishing, and you sprang to your feet, shaking every burden off you, to come to Me. Is it not so? So you are righteous of heart. More, much more than others who do not have your sin, but have many worse ones, because they were premeditated and stubbornly preserved alive...

May you, therefore, you the flowers of My triumph as Saviour, be blessed. In this dull hostile world, which sates the Saviour with bitterness and disgust, you have represented love. Thank you! In the most grievous hours of this year I bore you in mind to be comforted and supported. In the more grievous ones, which I am to suffer, I will bear you even more in mind. Until My death. And you will be with Me forever. I promise you.

I entrust you with My dearest interests, that is, the preparation of My Church in Asia Minor, where I cannot go, because the place of My mission is here, in Palestine, and also because the backward mentality of the mighty ones in Israel would injure Me in every possible way, if I went elsewhere. I wish I had more Johns and more Syntyches for other countries, so that My apostles would find the soil already ploughed to spread the seed in the hour to come!

Be kind and patient, and strong at the same time, in order to penetrate and tolerate. You will come across dullness and mockery. Do not let that discourage you. Say: "We are eating the same bread and drinking the same chalice as our Jesus is." You are not worth more than your Master and you cannot expect to have a better lot. *This is the greatest fortune: to share the lot of the Master.* I give you one order only: do not be disheartened, do not endeavour to give

yourselves an answer to why you have been sent away; you are not being sent into exile, as John is inclined to think, nay you are being placed on the threshold of your Fatherland before everybody else, because you are perfected servants, as no one else is. Heaven has come down upon you like a maternal veil and the King of Heaven is already welcoming you to His bosom, and will protect you under His bright wings of love, as the first-born of the numberless swarm of the servants of God, of the Word of God, Who in the name of the Father and of the Eternal Spirit blesses you now and forever.

And pray for Me, the Son of Man, Who is going towards all the tortures of the Redeemer. Oh! My Humanity is about to be crushed by the most bitter experience!... Pray for Me. *I will need your prayers...* They will be caresses... They will be professions of love... *They will help Me,* that I may not go to the extent of saying: "The whole of Mankind is made of demons"...

Goodbye, John! Kiss Me goodbye... Do not weep... I would have kept you with Me, at the cost of tearing bits of flesh off My body, had I not seen all the good that this separation will bring about both for you and for Me. Eternal good... Goodbye, Syntyche. Yes, you may kiss My hands, but bear in mind that, if the difference of sex prevents Me from kissing you as a sister, I give My brotherly kiss to your soul... And let your souls wait for Me. I will come. I will be close to your work and to your souls. I certainly will, because if My love for man has closed My divine Nature in mortal flesh, it did not limit its freedom. And as God I am free to go to those who deserve to have God with them. Goodbye, My children, The Lord is with you...»

And He tears Himself away from the convulsive grip of John, who had grasped His shoulders, and of Syntyche, who was clinging to His knees, and He jumps from the cart, waving goodbye to His apostles, running away along the road He came, as fast as a chased deer... The donkey has stopped, feeling that the reins, which were previously on Jesus' knees, had dropped completely. The eight astonished apostles have a so stopped and are looking at the Master Who is moving farther and farther away.

«He was weeping...» whispers John.

«And He was as pale as a dead body...» whispers James of Alphaeus.

«He has not even taken His sack... There it is on the cart...» remarks the other James.

«And what will He do now?» asks Matthew.

Judas of Alphaeus shouts at the top of his powerful voice: «Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!...» The echo of the hills replies far away: «Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!...» But the green trees at a bend of the road conceal the Master, Who does not even look back to see who is calling Him...

«He has gone... All we can do is to go as well...» says Peter desolately, getting on the cart and taking the reins to spur the donkey.

And the cart starts off and its squeaking is mingled with the rhythmical sound of the iron shoes of the donkey and the anguished weeping of the two disciples, who forlorn on the bottom of the cart are moaning: «We will never see Him again, never, never again...»

316. Jesus' Sorrow, Prayer and Penance.

2nd November 1945.

Jesus is once again at the foot of the massive height on which Jiphthahel is built. But He is not on the main road (let us call it so) or mule-track, along which the cart came. He is instead on a little footpath fit for ibexes, so steep it is, strewn with large stone splinters and deep crevices, and seems to be stuck on to the mountain side; I would say that it is engraved on the vertical face of the mountain, which looks as if it were scratched by a huge claw. At its edge there is a precipice, a sheer deep drop, at the bottom of which an angry torrent foams along. To slip there means to fall hopelessly, bouncing from one bush to another of bramble or other wild plants, which have grown between the crevices of the rocks, I do not know how, as they have not come up vertically, as is normal with plants, but obliquely and even horizontally, compelled by their ubication. To slip there means to be torn to pieces by the thorns of such plants, or to have one's back broken by the impact on rigid tree trunks protruding over the abyss. To slip there means to be lacerated by the sharp-edged stones sticking out from the face of the precipice. To slip there means to drop bleeding and in pieces into the foamy water of the angry torrent and be drowned, and lie submerged on a bed of pointed rocks and be lashed by the impetuous water. And yet Jesus is walking along that path, that scratch in the rock, which is even more dangerous because of the dampness that rises steaming from the torrent, or drops from the

overhanging surface and from the plants growing on that vertical face, which I would say is lightly concave.

He proceeds slowly, cautiously, watching each step on the sharp stones, some of which are wobbly, at times He is compelled to squeeze against the mountain side when the path narrows; and to pass over some particularly dangerous spots, He has to get hold of branches hanging from the rocks. He goes round the western side thus and reaches the southern one, where the mountain, after a perpendicular drop from the summit, becomes more concave than elsewhere, allowing the path thus to widen a little, but reducing its height, so that Jesus now and again must lower His head to avoid knocking it against the rocks.

Perhaps He intends to stop there, where the path ends abruptly, because of a landslide. But when He sees that under the cliff there is a cave, a fissure in the mountain rather than a cave, He lets Himself down among the fallen stones. He goes in. There is a cleft at first, then a large grotto inside, as if the mountain had been hollowed out a long time ago by man, for some unknown reason. One can clearly see that the natural curves of the rock have been enlarged by man, who, on the side opposite the entrance, opened a narrow corridor, at the end of which there is a streak of light, and remote forests can be seen, which proves that the corridor cuts through the mountain spur from the southern side to the eastern one.

Jesus slips into the narrow semidark tunnel and goes along it until He reaches its opening, which is above the road on which He came with the apostles and the cart to go up to Jiphthahel. The mountains surrounding the lake of Galilee are in front of Him, beyond the valley, and to the north-east the great Hermon shines in its snowy mantle. Rough steps have been dug on the mountain side, which is not so steep here, neither upwards nor downwards and the steps lead to the mule-track, which is in the valley, and also to the mountain top where is Jiphthahel.

Jesus is satisfied with His exploration. He goes back into the large cave and looks for a sheltered place where He heaps up dry leaves that the wind has blown inside. A very poor pallet, a thin layer of dry leaves laid between His body and the bare icy soil...

He drops on it and remains inert, lying with His hands under His head, staring at the rocky vault, absorbed, I would say bewildered, like one who bears a strain or is struck by sorrow greater than one's strength.

Then tears, without sobs, begin to drop slowly from His eyes and stream down both sides of His face, disappearing in His hair, near His ears, and ending among the dry leaves... He weeps thus, for a long time, without speaking or moving... He then sits up, and with His head between His raised knees, embraced by His clasped hands, He calls His far away Mother, with all His soul: «Mother! Mother! Mother of Mine! My eternal sweetness! Oh! Mother, I wish You were near Me! Why do I not always have You, the only comfort of God?»

Only the hollow cave replies to His words and His sobs with the whisper of a faint echo, and it seems to be weeping and sobbing itself through its edges and rocks and the few and still small stalactites hanging in a corner, the one which is probably most exposed to the internal activity of water.

Jesus continues weeping, although more calmly, as if the simple invocation of His Mother consoled Him and His weeping slowly changes into a monologue. «They have gone... Why? Whose fault is it? Why did I have to grieve them thus? And grieve Myself, since the world fills each day of Mine with affliction?... Judas!»...

I wonder where Jesus' thought wanders when He lifts His head from His knees and looks in front of Himself with wide open eyes and the tense face of a person engrossed in the vision of future spiritual events or in deep meditation. He no longer weeps. But he is evidently suffering. He then seems to be replying to an invisible interlocutor. And He stands up to do so.

«I am a man, Father. I am the Man. The virtue of friendship, which was wounded and torn from Me, is writhing and moaning sorrowfully... I know that I must suffer everything. I know as God and as God I want it for the good of the world. As man also I know, because My divine spirit informs My humanity. And also as man I want it, for the good of the world. But how grievous it is, O Father! This hour is much more sorrowful than the one I lived with Your spirit and Mine in the desert... And much stronger is the present temptation not to love and not to bear at My side the slimy tortuous being, whose name is Judas, the cause of the deep sorrow with which I am sated and which tortures the souls to whom I had given peace. Father, I perceive it. You are becoming more and more severe as I approach the end of My expiation on behalf of Mankind. Your kindness is moving farther and farther away from Me, and Your countenance appears more and more severe to My spirit, which is rejected more and more into the depth, where Mankind, struck by Your punishment, has been moaning for millennia. It was pleasant to suffer, pleasant was the way at the beginning of

My life, it was pleasant also when from the son of a carpenter I became the Master of the world, tearing Myself away from a Mother to give You, Father, to man who had fallen. It was still pleasant to Me, as compared with the present hour, to struggle with the Enemy, in the Temptation in the desert. I faced him with the boldness of a hero with intact strength... Oh! Father!... My strength is now encumbered by the indifference of too many people and the knowledge of too many things... I knew that Satan would go, when the temptation was over, and he did go, and the angels came to comfort Your Son for being a man, subject to the temptation of the Demon. But the temptation will not cease now, after this hour, in which the Friend suffers because of the friends sent away, and because of the perjured friend who injures Him both when he is near and far away. It will not cease. Your angels will not come to comfort Me in this hour and after it. But the world will come, with all its hatred, its mockery and incomprehension. And the traitor who sold himself to Satan will come and he, the perjurer, will be more and more tortuous and slimy. Father!!...» It is really a cry of anguish, of fear and of invocation and Jesus is agitated and reminds me of the hour at Gethsemane.

«Father! I know. I can see... While I suffer here and will suffer, and I offer My suffering to You for his conversion and for those who have been torn away from My arms and who are going towards their destiny with broken hearts, he is selling himself to become greater than I am: the Son of Man! I am, am I not, the Son of Man? Yes, but I am not the only one. Children were born of mankind, of prolific Eve, and if I am Abel, the Innocent One, Cain is not missing among the children of Mankind. And if I am the First-Born, because I am what the children of man should have been, without stain in Your eyes, he, who was born in sin, is the first of what men have become after eating the poisoned fruit. And now, not satisfied with having in himself the disgusting blasphemous incentives of falsehood, anti-charity, of thirst for blood, of greed for money, of pride and lust, he is raving to be the man who becomes a demon, whilst he is a man who could become an angel... “And Lucifer wanted to be like God and was therefore driven out of Paradise and changed into a demon and he dwelt in Hell.” But Father! Oh! Father! I love him... I still love him. He is a man... He is one of those for whom I left You... Save him, because of My humiliation... grant Me to redeem him, Most High Lord! I offer this penance more for him than for anybody else! Oh! I am aware of the incongruity of what I am asking, because I know everything!... But, Father, do not consider Me Your Word for a moment. Look only at the Humanity of the Just One... and let Me be for a moment only the

“Man” in Your grace, the Man who is not aware of the future, who can deceive himself... the Man who not being aware of ineluctable fate can pray with absolute hope, to wring a miracle out of You. A miracle! A miracle of Jesus of Nazareth, for Jesus of Mary of Nazareth, Our eternal Beloved One! A miracle that violates what has been set down and cancels it! The salvation of Judas! He has lived beside Me, he has drunk in My words, has shared food with Me, has slept on My chest... No, do not let him be My satan!... I am not asking You not to be betrayed... That must happen, and will happen... so that all falsehood may be cancelled by My sorrow of being betrayed, as all avarice may be expiated by My grief for being sold, as amends may be made for all blasphemy through My torment at being cursed, and faith may be given to those who are and will be without faith, through My torture at not being believed, and all the sins of flesh may be cleansed by My being scourged... But I beg You: not him, not Judas, My friend, My apostle! I would like no one to be a traitor... No one... Not even the remotest inhabitant of the hyperborean ice fields or of the torrid zone... I would like You alone to be the Sacrificer... as You already have been in the past when You set fire to the holocausts by means of Your flames... But since I am to die by the hand of man, and since the traitor friend will be a more brutal executioner than the real executioner, the putrid traitor who will have in himself the stench of Satan, and is already inhaling it to be like Me in power... that is what he thinks in his pride and lust... since I am to die by the hand of man, Father, do not let him whom I called friend and I loved as such, be My Traitor. Increase My torment, Father, but give Me Judas' soul... I am putting this prayer on the altar of My victim Person... Accept it, Father!...

Heaven is closed and silent!... Is this therefore the horror that I shall have with Me until My Death? Heaven is silent and closed!... Is this therefore the silence and the prison in which I shall breathe My last? Heaven is closed and silent!... Is this therefore the supreme torture of the Martyr?... Father, may Your will be done, not Mine... But because of My suffering, oh! grant Me at least this: give peace and illusion to Judas' other martyr, to John of Endor, Father... He is really better than many. He has already gone a long way, such as few are or will be able to go. Redemption has already been completed for him. Give him, therefore, Your total complete peace, so that I may have him in My Glory, when everything will be completed also for Me in Your honour and obedience... Father!...»

Jesus has slowly fallen on His knees and is now weeping with His face on the ground, and while He prays the light of the short winter day fades precociously

in the dark cavern, and the roar of the torrent seems to grow louder as the shade in the valley becomes darker...

317. Leaving Ptolemais for Tyre.

3rd November 1945.

The town of Ptolemais looks as if it is to remain overwhelmed by a low leaden sky, without a gleam of azure, without any change in its dullness. There is not a cloud, a cirrus, a nimbus sailing all alone in the closed vault of heaven. The firmament looks like a solid convex heavy lid on the point of crashing on a case. A huge lid of dirty, sooty, dull, oppressive tin. The white houses of the town seem to be made of chalk, of coarse rough chalk that looks desolate in this light... the green of evergreens seems dull and sad, the faces of people look wan or ghastly and the shades of their clothes colourless. The town is stifled with heavy sirocco.

The sea matches the sky with similar deadly dullness. An infinite, still, lonely sea. It is not even leaden, it would be wrong to describe it as such. It is a limitless expanse, and I would say rippleless, of an oily substance, as grey, I suppose, as lakes of crude petroleum must be, or rather, if it were possible, lakes of silver mixed with soot and ashes, to make a pomade with a special brightness of quartziferous scales, which however is so deadly dull that it does not seem to shine. Its gleaming is noticed only through the discomfort it causes to one's eyes, dazzled by such flickering of blackish mother-of-pearl, which tires them without delighting them. There is not a wave as far as the eyes can see. One can see as far as the horizon, where the dead sea touches the dead sky, without seeing a wave stir; but one realises that the water is not solidified because there is an underwater gurgle, which is hardly perceptible on the surface through the dark glittering of the water. The sea is so still that at the shore the water is as motionless as the water in a vat, without the slightest indication of waves or surf. And the sand bears clean marks of dampness at a metre or little more from the water, proving thus that for many hours there has been no movement of waves on the shore. There is dead calm.

The few boats in the harbour do not stir. They are so still that they seem to be

nailed on a solid substance, and the few strips of cloth stretched out on the high decks, ensigns or garments, whatever they may be, are hanging motionless.

The apostles with the two bound for Antioch are coming from a lane in the working-class district near the harbour. I do not know what has happened to the donkey and the cart. They are not there. Peter and Andrew are carrying one chest, James and John the other one, while Judas of Alphaeus is carrying on his shoulder the dismantled loom and Matthew, James of Alphaeus and Simon Zealot are laden with all the bags, including Jesus'. Syntyche is holding only a basket with foodstuffs. John of Endor is not carrying anything. They walk fast among the people coming back mostly from the market with their shopping, while seamen are hastening towards the port to load or unload ships or repair them, according to their requirements.

Simon of Jonah is proceeding resolutely. He must be already aware of where to go, because he does not look around. He is flushed while holding the chest, on one side, by a loop of a rope which serves as a handle, and Andrew does likewise on the other side. And one can see, both in them and in their companions, their efforts in carrying their weights, as the muscles of their calves and arms bulge, in fact, in order to move freely, they are wearing only short sleeveless undertunics and are thus like porters hurrying from warehouses to ships or vice versa, doing their work. They thus pass by completely unnoticed.

Peter does not go to the large quay, but along a squeaky footbridge he goes to the little one, a little arched pier forming another much narrower dock for fishing boats. He looks around and cries out.

A man replies, standing up in a stout rather large boat. «Do you really want to go? Mind you, sails are of no use today. You will have to row.»

«It will warm me up and give me an appetite.»

«But are you really capable of sailing?»

«Hey! man! I could not say “mummy” yet, and my father had already put line and sail ropes in my hands. I sharpened my milkteeth on them...»

«It's because... you know... this boat is all my wealth... you know?...»

«You already told me yesterday... Don't you know any other song?»

«I know that if you go to the bottom, I will be ruined and...»

«I will be ruined, because I shall lose my life, not you!»

«But this is all I own, it's my bread, my joy and the joy of my wife, it's my little girl's dowry, and...»

«Ugh! Listen, don't get on my nerves, which are already seized with a cramp... a cramp! more dreadful than a swimmer's. I have given you so much that I could say: “I bought your boat”, I did not haggle over the price requested by you, you sea-thief, I proved to you that I am more familiar with oars and sails than you are, and everything was settled. Now, if the leek-salad you had last night and your mouth stinks like a bilge has given you nightmares and remorse, I don't care. The business was done in the presence of two witnesses, one was yours and the other one mine, and that's all. Get out of there, you shaggy crab, and let me get in.»

«But I... at least some guarantee... If you die, who will pay for my ship?»

«Your ship? Are you calling this hollowed pumpkin a ship? You miserable proud man! But I will reassure you, providing you make up your mind: I will give you another hundred drachmas. With this lot and what you wanted as rent you can buy three more of such moles... No, just a moment. No money. You would be equally capable of saying that I am mad and asking for more when I come back. Because I will come back, you may rest assured. Even if I have to come back to teach you a lesson by boxing your ears if you have given me a boat with a faulty keel. I will pledge the donkey and cart to you... No! Not even that! I will not trust you with my Antonius. You might change trade and from a boatman become a carter, and slink off while I am away. And my Antonius is worth your boat ten times over. It is better if I give you some money. But mind you, it is a pledge, and you will give it back to me when I come back. Is that clear? Hey, you of the boat! Who is from Ptolemais?»

Three faces appear from a nearby boat: «We are.»

«Come here.»

«No, it's not necessary. Let us settle the matter between ourselves» begs the boatman.

Peter scans his face, ponders upon it, and when he sees that the other man leaves the boat and hastens to put on board the loom that Judas had left on the ground, he whispers: «I see!». He shouts to those in the other boat: «It's no longer necessary. Stay where you are» and taking some coins out of a small purse, he

counts them and kisses them saying: «Goodbye, my dear!» and he hands them to the boatman.

«Why did you kiss them?» asks the amazed man.

«Just a... rite. Goodbye, you thief! Come on, all of you. And you, man, at least hold the boat. You will count them later and will find that they are right. I do not want to be your companion in hell, you know? I am not a thief. Heave ho! Heave ho!» and he pulls the first chest on board. He then helps the others to stow theirs, as well as the bags and everything else, balancing the weight and arranging the various items so as to be free to manoeuvre. And after the objects he arranges the passengers. «You can see that I know how to do it, you blood-sucker! Let go and go to your destiny.» And with Andrew he presses an oar against the little pier to depart from it.

When the boat is in the flow of the current he hands the rudder over to Matthew saying: «You used to come and catch us when we were out fishing, in order to fleece us properly and you can handle it fairly well» and he sits on the first bench at the prow, with his back to the bows, and Andrew sits beside him. James and John of Zebedee are sitting in front of them and are rowing with strong regular strokes.

The boat is sailing fast and smoothly, although it has a heavy load, skimming the sides of large ships, from the boards of which words can be heard praising their perfect rowing. Then there is the open sea, beyond the break-waters... The whole of Ptolemais appears before the eyes of the departing group, as the town is stretched along the beach with the port to the south. There is dead silence in the boat. Only the squeaking of the oars in the rowlocks can be heard.

After a long while, when Ptolemais has already been left behind, Peter says: «However, if there had been a little wind... But nothing! Not a breath of it!...»

«Providing it does not rain!...» says James of Zebedee. «H'm! It looks very much like it...» There is silence for a long time while the men row hard. Then Andrew asks: «Why did you kiss the coins?»

«Because those who part always greet one another. I will never see them again. And I am sorry. I would have preferred to give them to some poor wretch... Never mind! The boat is really a good one, it is strong and well built. It is the best one in Ptolemais. That is why I gave in to the demands of the owner. Also to avoid many questions about our destination. That is why I said to him: “To

make purchases at the white Garden.”... Ah! It's beginning to rain. Cover yourselves up, you who are in a position to do so, and you, Syntyche, give John his egg. It's time... Much more so, because with a sea like this, nothing will upset his stomach... And what will Jesus be doing? I wonder what He is doing! With no clothes, no money! Where will He be now?»

«He will certainly be praying for us» replies John of Zebedee.

«Very well. But where?...»

Nobody can say where. And the boat proceeds heavily, laboriously, under a leaden sky, on the grey bitumenous sea, in a drizzling rain as fine as fog and as boring as protracted tickling. The mountains, which after a flat area are now close to the sea, look livid in the foggy air. The sea nearby continues to irritate one's eyes with its strange phosphorence, and farther away it fades into a hazy veil.

«We will stop at that village to rest and eat» says Peter who rows untiringly. The others agree.

They reach the village. A little group of fishermen's houses built on a mountain spur protruding towards the sea.

«It is not possible to land here. There is no bottom...» grumbles Peter. «Well, we shall eat where we are.»

In fact the oarsmen eat with appetite, whereas the two exiles take some food unwillingly. It begins and stops raining alternately.

The village is deserted as if there were no inhabitants in it. And yet flights of doves from one house to another and clothes hanging out on roof-terraces prove that there are people in it. At last a half-naked man appears in the street and goes towards a little beached boat.

«Hey, man! Are you a fisherman?» shouts Peter holding his hands like a speaking-trumpet. «Yes.» His assent is heard feebly owing to the distance. «What will the weather be like?»

«Long sea shortly. If you are not from this place, I tell you to round the cape at once. Over there it is not so rough, particularly if you keep close to the shore, which you can do, as the sea is deep. But go at once...»

«Yes, I will. Peace to you!»

«Peace and good luck to you.»

«Let's go then» says Peter to his companions. «And may God be with us.»

«He certainly is. Jesus is certainly praying for us» replies Andrew resuming rowing.

But the sea is, in fact, already long and the waves push and drag the poor boat alternately, while the rain becomes thicker... and a blustery wind joins in to torture the poor people in the boat. Simon of Jonah gratifies it with all the most picturesque epithets, because it is a wicked wind that cannot be used to sail and it pushes the boat towards the rocks of the cape, which is now close at hand. The boat proceeds with difficulty in the curve of the little gulf, which is as black as ink. They row with difficulty, flushing, sweating, clenching their teeth, without wasting the least particle of strength in words. The others, sitting opposite them – I can see their backs – are silent in the boring rain: John and Syntyche in the centre, near the sail mast, Alphaeus' sons behind them, Matthew and Simon are last, struggling to hold the rudder straight against each breaker.

It is a difficult task to round the cape. But they succeed at last... And the oarsmen, who must be exhausted, have a little rest. They consult whether they should take shelter in a little village beyond the cape. But the idea prevails that «the Master is to be obeyed even against common sense. And He said that they must arrive at Tyre in one day». So they go on...

The sea calms all of a sudden. They notice the phenomenon and James of Alphaeus says: «The reward of obedience.»

«Yes, Satan has gone because he did not succeed in making us disobey» confirms Peter. «But we shall arrive at Tyre at night. We have been greatly delayed...» says Matthew.

«It does not matter. We shall go to bed and we shall look for the ship tomorrow» replies Simon Zealot.

«But shall we find it?»

«Jesus said so. So we shall find it» says Thaddeus confidently.

«We can hoist the sail, brother» remarks Andrew.

«The wind is favourable and we will move fast.»

The wind in fact fills the sail, although not very much, but enough to make

rowing less necessary and the boat glides, as if it had been lightened, towards Tyre, the promontory of which, or rather, its isthmus, is white, to the north, in the last light of the day.

And night falls fast. And it is strange, after so much dullness of sky, to see stars appear in an unforeseeable clear sky and the Great Bear shine brightly in its stars, while the sea is illuminated by placid moonlight, which is so white that it seems to be dawning after a painful day, without an intervening night...

John of Zebedee looks at the sky and smiles and he suddenly begins to sing, pulling his oar with his song and modulating his words to the rhythm of rowing:

«Hail, Star of the Morning, Jasmine of the night,
Golden Moon of my Heaven, Holy Mother of Jesus.
The sailor hopes in You, Who suffers and dies dreams of You,
Shine, holy pious Star, Upon those who love You, Mary!...»

He sings out happily in a tenor voice. «What are you doing? We are talking of Jesus and you are singing of Mary?» asks his brother.

«He is in Her and She is in Him. But He is because She was... Let me sing...»
And he starts singing with his whole heart, leading all the others...

They thus reach Tyre where they land without any difficulty in the little port, south of the isthmus, lit up by lamps hanging from many boats, with the help also of people present there.

While Peter and James remain in the boat to look after the chests, the others, with a man from another boat, go to a hotel to rest.

318. Departure from Tyre on a Cretan Ship.

4th November 1945.

Tyre awakes among gusts of mistral. The sea is sparkling with bright white-blue little waves, under a blue sky and white cirri moving up there, as the foaming waves move down here. The sun is enjoying a clear day after so much dull bad weather.

«I see» says Peter, standing up in the boat where he slept. «It's time to go. And "it" (and he points at the sea, which is rough even within the entrance of the port) sprayed us with lustral water...

H'm! Let us go and fulfill the second part of the sacrifice... Tell me, James... Don't you think that we are taking two victims to be sacrificed? I do.»

«So do I, Simon. And... I thank the Master for thinking highly of us. But... I would have preferred not to see so much grief. And I would never have thought I was to see all this...»

«Neither would I... But... You know? I say that the Master would not have done this, if the Sanhedrin had not poked their noses into the matter...»

«He in fact said so... But who told the Sanhedrin? That is what I would like to know...»

«Who? Eternal God, make me be silent and do not let me think! I made this vow to get rid of the suspicion that tortures me. Help me, James, not to think. Speak of something else.»

«Of what? Of the weather?»

«Yes, it's better.»

«The trouble is that I know nothing about the sea...»

«I think that we are going to be tossed...» says Peter looking at the sea.

«No! Only small waves. It's nothing. It was worse yesterday. It will be lovely to look at this moderate sea from the upper deck of the ship. John will like it... It will make him sing. Which ship will it be?»

He stands up as well, looking at the ships on the other side, the high superstructures of which become visible particularly when their boat is raised by the up-and-down motion of the waves. They examine the various ships, guessing... The port is becoming alive with people.

Peter asks a boatman, or the like, who is bustling on the dock: «Can you tell me whether in the port over there, there is the ship of... wait a moment till I read his name... (and he takes out of his belt a tied parchment), here it is: Nicomedes Philadelphius of Philip, a Cretan from Paleocaster...»

«Oh! The great navigator! Who does not know him? I think that he is known not

only from the Pearl Gulf to the pillars of Hercules, but also as far as the cold seas, where they say that night lasts for months! You are a sailor, how come you do not know him?»

«No. I don't know him, but I shall soon meet him, because I am looking for him on behalf of our friend Lazarus of Theophilus, formerly governor in Syria.»

«Ah! When I was a sailor – I am old now – he was in Antioch... Wonderful times... Your friend? And you are looking for Nicomedes, the Cretan? You need not worry, then. See that ship over there, the highest one, with flying colours? That's his ship. He will sail before the sixth hour. He is not afraid of the sea!...»

«In fact there is no need to be afraid of it. It's not really rough.» But a high wave gives him the lie, drenching both of them from head to foot.

«Yesterday it was too calm, today too rough. It's really mad. I prefer the lake...» grumbles Peter drying his face.

«I advise you to go into the basin. Everybody goes there.»

«But we are leaving. We are going in the ship of... of... wait: Nicomedes, and all the rest!» says Peter who cannot remember the strange names of the Cretan.

«You are not going to load your boat also on the ship?»

«Of course not!»

«Well, there is room in the basin for boats and men to look after them until you come back. A coin a day until you come back. I suppose you are coming back...»

«Certainly. We are going and will come back after seeing the state of Lazarus' garden, that's all.»

«Ah! You are his stewards?»

«Yes, and something more...»

«Well. Come with me. I will show you the place. It's really made for those who leave their boats there, like you...»

«Wait... Here are the others. We will be with you in a moment.» And Peter jumps on the quay and runs to meet his companions who are approaching.

«Did you sleep well, brother?» asks Andrew kindly.

«Like a baby in a cradle. And I was lulled to sleep with a lullaby...»

«I think that you had also a good wash» says Thaddeus smiling.

«Yes! The sea... is so kind that it washed my face to wake me up.»

«It looks very rough to me» remarks Matthew.

«Oh! But if you knew with whom we are going! One who is known even to the fish of the ice-cold seas.»

«Have you already seen him?»

«No, but I was told by one who says that there is a place for boats, a depot... Come, we will unload the chests and will go, because Nicodemus, no, Nicomedes, the Cretan, will be sailing soon.»

«In the Cyprus channel we shall be tossed about in good style» says John of Endor.

«Shall we?» asks Matthew anxiously.

«Yes. But God will help us.»

They are near their boat once again.

«Here we are, man. We are unloading this luggage and then we will go, since you are so kind.»

«We help one another...» says the man from Tyre.

«Of course! We help one another, we ought to help one another. We ought to love one another, because that is the Law of God...»

«I am told that a new Prophet has risen in Israel and that is what He preaches. Is it true?»

«Is it true! That and much more! And the miracles that He works!

Come on, Andrew, heave ho! heave ho! a little to your right. Right, when the wave lifts the boat... There you are, it's up!... I was saying, man: and what miracles! Dead people rise from death, sick people are cured, the blind see, thieves repent and even... See? If He were here, He would say to the sea: “Be still” and the sea would calm down... Can you manage, John? Wait, I'll come and help you. Hold the boat still and close... Up, up... a little more... Simon, take the handle... Watch your hand, Judas! Up, up... Thank you, man... Watch you

don't fall into the water, you sons of Alphaeus... Up... Here we are! Praised be the Lord! We had less trouble in stowing them than in pulling them up... But my arms are sore after yesterday's exercise... So, I was saying about the sea...»

«But is it true?»

«True? I was there and saw it!»

«Were you? Oh!... But where was it?»

«On the lake of Gennesaret. Come in the boat, while going to the basin, I will tell you...» and he goes away with the man and James, rowing in the canal towards the basin.

«And Peter says that he does not know how to do...» remarks the Zealot. «Instead he has a talent for telling things in a simple way and he is more efficient than anybody else.»

«What I like so much in him is his honesty» says the man from Endor.

«And his perseverance» adds Matthew.

«And his humility. He does not pride himself on being our “head”! He works more than anybody and worries more about us than about himself...» says James of Alphaeus.

«And he is so virtuous in his feelings. A good brother. Nothing more...» concludes Syntyche.

«So it is all settled: you will be considered as brother and sister?» the Zealot asks the two disciples after some time.

«Yes, it is better so. And it is not a lie, it is spiritual truth. He is my elder brother, of different marriage, but of the same father. The Father is God, the different marriages: Israel and Greece; and John is older, as one can see, by age, and – and one cannot see it but it is true – by being a disciple before me. Here is Simon coming back...»

«It's all done. Let's go.»

Through the narrow isthmus they pass into the other port carrying the chests on their shoulders. The man from Tyre, familiar as he is with the place, takes them through the narrow passages between piles of bales of goods under very wide sheds, to the powerful ship of the Cretan, who is preparing to depart. He shouts to those on board to lower the gangway that they had already lifted.

«It's not possible. We have finished loading» shouts the head of the crew.

«He has letters to hand to you» says the man pointing to Simon of Jonah.

«Letters? From whom?»

«From Lazarus of Theophilus, the former governor of Antioch.»

«Ah! I will tell the boss.»

Simon says to the other Simon and to Matthew: «You will speak now. I am too coarse to speak to a man like him...»

«No. You are the head and you will speak because you are doing very well. We will help you, eventually. But there will be no need.»

«Where is the man with the letters? Let him come up» says a man as swarthy as an Egyptian: he is thin, handsome, agile, severe looking, about forty years old, or a little older, and looks down from the high ship's side. And he orders the gangway to be lowered.

Simon of Jonah, who has put on his tunic and mantle while waiting for a reply, goes up with a dignified bearing. The Zealot and Matthew follow him.

«Peace to you, man» greets Peter gravely.

«Hail. Where is the letter?» asks the Cretan.

«Here it is.»

The Cretan breaks the seal, unfolds the roll and reads.

«The messengers of Theophilus' family are welcome! The Cretans have not forgotten that he was good and kind. But be quick. Have you much to load?»

«What you see on the quay.»

«And how many are you...»

«Ten.»

«Good. We will find accommodation for the woman. You will adapt yourselves as best you can. Quick. We must set sail before the wind becomes stronger and that will happen after the sixth hour.»

With rending whistling he orders the chests to be loaded and stowed. Then the apostles and the two disciples go on board. The gangway is lifted, the ship's side

is closed, the moorings are picked up, the sails are hoisted. And the ship sets out rolling steeply while leaving the harbour. Then the sails stretch out creaking, as the wind fills them, and pitching heavily the ship puts out to sea sailing fast towards Antioch...

Notwithstanding the very strong wind, John and Syntyche, one close to the other, holding on to a tackle, aft, are looking at the coast, the land of Palestine move away, and they weep...

319. Storm and Miracles on the Ship.

5th November 1945.

The Mediterranean is an enraged expanse of green-blue water, with very high foam-crested billows clashing one against the other. There is no thick fog today. But the sea water, pulverised by the continuous pounding of breakers, is turned into a burning salty dust that penetrates even into people's clothes, reddens eyes, irritates throats, and seems to spread like a veil of salt powder everywhere, both in the air, making it opaque as thin fog does, and on things that seem sprayed with bright flour: the minute salt crystals. That happens, however, where there is no pounding of billows, or where the waves do not wash the deck from one side to the other, crashing on to it, rushing over the ship's side, then falling again into the sea, with the roar of a waterfall, through bilge drain holes in the opposite side. And the ship rises and plunges into the water, a twig at the mercy of the ocean, a mere nothing compared to it, squeaking and moaning from the bilges to the tops of the masts... The sea is really the master and the ship its plaything...

With the exception of those manoeuvring the boat, no one is on the deck. There are no goods either, only the lifeboats. And the crewmen, first of all the Cretan Nicomedes, half-naked, rolling like the ship, run here and there, refitting and securing, a difficult task because of the flooded slippery deck. The locked hatchways make it impossible to see what is happening below deck. But I am sure that they cannot be very happy down there!...

I cannot make out where they are, because there is nothing but sea around and a remote coast, which appears to be a mountainous one, with real mountains, not hills. I would say that they have been sailing for more than one day, because it is

certainly morning, as the sun, which appears and disappears among thick clouds, is shining from the east.

I think that the ship is making little progress, notwithstanding that she is tossed about so much. And the sea seems to become more and more precipitous.

With a frightening crash a part of a mast, the precise name of which I do not know, breaks off, and in falling, dragged by an avalanche of water which collapses on the deck together with a real whirlwind, knocks down part of the ship's side.

Those below must feel that the ship is foundering... And that is proved, after a moment, when a hatch is half-opened and Peter's grey haired head juts out. He looks around, sees, and closes the hatch just in time to prevent a torrent of water from falling through it. But later, in a moment of calm, he opens it again and jumps out. He clings to supports and watches all hell let loose and he whistles and mumbles commenting the situation.

Nicomedes sees him: «Away! Go away!» he shouts. «Close that hatch. If the ship becomes heavier, she will sink. We are lucky if I do not have to throw the cargo overboard... Never seen a storm like this! I'm telling you, get away! I don't want landlubbers in my way. This is no place for gardeners, and...» He cannot continue because another wave sweeps the deck drenching all those on it. «See?» he shouts to Peter who is dripping wet.

«I see. But it doesn't surprise me. I am not capable only of looking after gardens. I was born on water, of a lake, that's true... But even a lake!... Before being a gardener I was a fisherman and I know...»

Peter is very calm and he knows how to be with the rolling of the ship perfectly well with his sturdy legs wide apart. The Cretan watches him while he moves to go near him.

«Are you not afraid?» he asks him.

«I wouldn't dream of it!»

«And the others?»

«Three are fishermen like me, that is, they were... The others, with the exception of the sick man, are strong.»

«Also the woman?... Watch! Look out! Hold on!»

Another avalanche of water invades the deck. Peter waits until it is over and then says: «I could have done with this coolness last summer... Never mind! You were asking what the woman is doing. She is praying... and you had better do the same. But where are we now, exactly? In the Cyprus channel?»

«I wish we were! I would sail to the island and wait for the elements to calm. We are just off Colonia Julia, or Beritus, if you prefer so. Now we will get the worst of it... Those are the Lebanon mountains.»

«Could you not go in there, where the village is?»

«It's not a good port, reefs and rocks. It's not possible. Watch!...»

Another whirlwind and another piece of a mast falls striking a man, who is not washed overboard only because the wave carries him against an obstacle.

«Go below deck! Go! See?»

«I see, I see... but that man?...»

«If he is not dead he'll come round. I cannot look after him... You can see!...» In fact the Cretan has to have eyes in the back of his head for the sake of everybody's life.

«Give him to me. The woman will look after him...»

«Anything you want, but go away!...»

Peter creeps as far as the motionless man, gets hold of his foot and pulls him towards himself. He looks at him, whistles... He grumbles: «His head is split like a ripe pomegranate. The Lord should be here... Oh! if He were! Lord Jesus! My Master, why have You left us?» There is deep sorrow in his voice...

He loads the dying man on his shoulder, being drenched himself with blood, and goes back to the hatch.

The Cretan shouts to him: «It's quite useless. Nothing doing. See!...»

But Peter, loaded as he is, makes a gesture as if to say: «We shall see» and he presses against a pole to resist a new wave. He then opens the hatch and shouts: «James, John, come here!» and with their help he lowers the wounded man, then descends himself securing the hatch.

In the smoky light of hanging lamps they see that Peter is bleeding: «Are you wounded?» they ask him.

«No, not I. It's his blood... But... you may as well pray because... Syntyche, look here. You told me once that you know how to cure wounded people. Look at this head...»

Syntyche leaves John of Endor, whom she was supporting, as he is suffering a great deal, and goes to the table on which they have laid the poor man, and she looks...

«A bad wound! I have seen the like twice, in two slaves, one was struck by his master, the other by a stone at Caprarola. I would need water, a lot of water to clean it and stop the blood...»

«If you want just water!... There is even too much! Come, James, with the tub. We will handle it better in two.»

They go and come back dripping wet. And Syntyche with wet cloths washes and applies compresses to the nape of his neck... But the wound is a nasty one. The bone is bare from the temple to the nape. And yet the man opens his eyes vaguely and grumbles while gasping for breath. He is seized by the instinctive fear of death.

«Good! Be good! You will recover» says the Greek woman comforting him with motherly love and she speaks to him in Greek as Greek is his language.

The man, although stunned, is amazed and looks at her with a faint smile upon hearing his mother tongue and searches for Syntyche's hand... man who becomes a child as soon as he suffers and looks for a woman who is always a mother in such cases.

«I am going to try with Mary's ointment» says Syntyche when the wound bleeds less.

«But that is for pains...» objects Matthew, who has turned deadly pale, I do not know whether because of the rough sea or at the sight of blood, or because of both.

«Oh! Mary prepared it, with Her own hands! I will use it praying... Will you pray, too. It can do no harm. Oil is always a medicine...»

She goes to Peter's sack, takes a vase out of it, a bronze vase I would say, opens it, and takes a little ointment, which she warms on a lamp in the same lid of the vase. She pours it on a folded piece of linen cloth and applies it to the wounded head. She then bandages it tightly with linen strips. She places a folded mantle

under the head of the wounded man who seems to doze off and she sits near him praying; the others also pray.

The storm is still raging on the deck and the ship is pitching awfully. After some time a hatch is opened and a sailor rushes in.

«What's the matter?» asks Peter.

«We are in danger. I have come to get incense and offerings for a sacrifice...»

«Forget about such nonsense!»

«But Nicomedes wants to sacrifice to Venus! We are in her sea...»

«Which is as frantic as she is» grumbles Peter in a low voice. Then a little louder: «You, come with me. Let's go on deck. Perhaps there is work to be done... Are you afraid to stay with the wounded man and those two?» The two are Matthew and John of Endor, who are worn out by seasickness.

«No. You may go» replies Syntyche.

While getting on deck they run into the Cretan who is endeavouring to light the incense and who attacks them furiously to send them below, shouting: «Can't you see that without a miracle we shall be shipwrecked? It's the first time! The first time since I have been sailing!»

«Just listen: he will now say that we have cast a spell!» whispers Judas of Alphaeus.

In fact the man shouts louder: «Cursed Israelites, what have you got on you? You dogs, you have cast a spell on me! Go away? I am now going to offer a sacrifice to new-born Venus...»

«No, not at all. We will sacrifice...»

«Go away! You are pagans, you are demons, you are...»

«Do you hear that? I swear to you that if you let us do what we want to do, you will see the miracle.»

«No. Go away!» and he lights the incense and he throws into the sea, as best he can, some liquids that he had previously offered and tasted, as well as some powders, which I do not recognise. But the waves put the incense out and the sea, instead of calming, rages more and more, washing away all the paraphernalia of the rite and nearly sweeping away Nicomedes as well...

«Your goddess is giving you a beautiful answer! It's our turn now. We have One as well, purer than that one made of foam, but then... Sing, John, as you did yesterday, and we will follow you, and let us see!»

«Yes, let us see! But if it comes to the worst, I will throw you overboard as propitiatory victims.»

«All right. Come on, John!»

And John strikes up his song, followed by all the others, including Peter, who usually does not sing, as he is always out of tune. The Cretan is watching them, with folded arms and a smile that is half angry and half ironical. After the song, they pray with their arms stretched out. It must be the «Our Father» but it is in Hebrew and I do not understand it. They then sing louder. They thus alternate songs with prayers without fear or interruptions, although they are struck by the waves. They do not even hold on to supports, and yet they are so self-confident as if they were one thing with the wood of the deck. And the violence of the waves really begins to abate slowly. It does not cease completely, as the wind does not drop entirely. But the storm is not as furious as previously, neither do the waves wash the deck.

The face of the Cretan is a poem of amazement... Peter casts sidelong glances at him and continues praying. John smiles and sings louder... The others follow him exceeding the roar of the waves more and more clearly as the sea calms down into a normal motion and the wind begins to blow favourably.

«Well? What do you think of it?...»

«But what did you say? What formula is it?»

«That of the True God and of His holy Handmaid. You may hoist your sails and sort things out, here... Is that not an island?»

«Yes, it's Cyprus... And the sea is even calmer in its channel... How strange! But that star that you worship, who is it? Venus, isn't it?»

«You should say: that you venerate. We worship God only. But She has nothing to do with Venus. She is Mary. Mary of Nazareth, the Hebraic Mary, the Mother of Jesus, the Messiah of Israel.»

«And that other thing, what was it? That wasn't Hebrew...»

«No, it was our dialect, the dialect of our lake, of our fatherland. But we cannot

tell you, a pagan. It's a speech addressed to Jehovah, and only believers can learn it. Goodbye, Nicomedes. And don't regret what has gone to the bottom. A... spell less to cause you misfortune. Goodbye, eh? Are you dumbfounded?»

«No... But... Excuse me... I insulted you!»

«Oh! It does not Matter! The effects of... Venus' cult... Come on, boys, let's go to the others...» and smiling happily Peter goes towards the hatchway.

The Cretan follows them: «Listen! And what about the man? Is he dead?»

«Not at all! We may give him back to you safe and sound very shortly... Just another trick of our... spells...»

«Oh! Please excuse me! But tell me, where can one learn them in order to be helped? I am prepared to pay for that...»

«Goodbye, Nicomedes! It's a long story... and it's not allowed... Sacred things are not to be given to heathens. Goodbye! Fare you well, my friend!»

And Peter, followed by all the others, goes below deck, smiling. Also the sea is now a pleasant sight, a fair mistral now favours navigation while the sun is setting and a slice of the waxing moon looms in the east...

320. Arrival and Landing at Seleucia.

6th November 1945.

The town of Seleucia appears in a beautiful sunset like a huge white mass on the edge of the blue water of the sea, which is placid and pleasantly bright, while the breeze plays among the little waves under a cloudless sky that blends its cobalt blue with the purple of sunset. The ship is heading under sail towards the remote town and is so flooded by the splendour of the setting sun, that she seems ablaze with lights of joy for the arrival now close at hand.

On the deck, among sailors no longer busy or worried, there are passengers who see that their destination is approaching. The injured sailor is sitting beside John of Endor, who is much more emaciated than when he left. The man's head is still dressed with a light bandage and he is as pale as ivory because of the blood he

has lost. But he is smiling and he speaks to those who saved him and to his companions who, as they pass, congratulate him on his return to deck.

The Cretan also sees him and entrusting his post for a moment to the coxswain, he comes to greet his «very good Demetes», who has come back on deck for the first time after being hurt. «And thanks to all of you» he says to the apostles. «I did not think he could survive, after being struck by the heavy beam and by the iron, which made it even heavier. Demetes, these people have really brought you back to life, because you were as good as dead, and not once, but twice. The first time when you were lying like a bale of goods on the deck, and because of the blood you were losing and of the waves that would have washed you overboard, you would have died and gone down to the kingdom of Neptune among Nereids and Tritons. The second time because they cured you with their wonderful ointments. Let me see your wound.»

The man undoes the bandage and shows a smooth healed scar, like a red mark from his temple to his nape, just under his hair, which appears to be cut, probably by Syntyche, to keep it out of the wound. Nicomedes touches the mark lightly: «Even the bone is healed! Marine Venus did love you! And she wanted you only on the surface of the sea and on the shores of Greece. May Eros be gracious to you, now that we land, and assist you to forget your misfortune and the terror of Thanatos as you were already in his grip.»

Peter's face displays his feeling on hearing so many mythological embellishments. Leaning against a mast, with his hands behind his back, he does not speak, but everything speaks in him fastening a biting epithet on heathen Nicomedes and his heathenism, and expressing his disgust at the whole of Gentilism.

The others are not less disgusted... Judas of Alphaeus is frowning as he normally does when in a bad temper, his brother is moving around showing a great interest in the sea. James of Zebedee decides that the best thing to do is to leave them all and go below deck to get the bags and the loom, Matthew is toying with his belt and the Zealot imitates him, busying himself exceedingly with his sandals, as if they were something new, and John of Zebedee is hypnotised contemplating the sea.

The contempt and annoyance of the eight apostles is so obvious – and the mutism of the two disciples sitting near the wounded man is just as clear – that the Cretan becomes aware of it and he apologises: «It's our religion, you know?

As you believe in yours, we all believe in ours...»

No one replies and the Cretan wisely decides to leave his gods in peace and descend from Olympus on the earth, or rather on the sea, on his ship, inviting the apostles to go on to the prow to have a good view of the town that they are approaching. «There it is, see? Have you ever been here?»

«I was here, once, but I came by land» says the Zealot gravely and dryly.

«Very well! So you know that Seleucia is the real port of Antioch. The sea-town is at the mouth of the river Orontes, which is also gracefully suitable to receive boats that can go up the river as far as Antioch when the water is deep. The town you see, the larger one, is Seleucia. The other one, to the south, is not a town, but the ruins of a devastated place. They are deceiving, but it is a dead place. That chain is the Pierios, after which the town is called Seleucia Pieria. The mountain top farther inland, beyond the plain, is mount Casius, and it dominates like a giant the plain of Antioch. The other chain to the north is the Amanus. Oh! You will see the work the Romans have done in Seleucia and in Antioch! They could not have done anything greater. A port with three basins, which is one of the best, canals, jetties and breakwaters. There is not so much in Palestine. But Syria is better than other provinces in the Empire...»

His words fall in deathlike silence. Even Syntyche, who being Greek is less squeamish than the others, sets her lips, and her face becomes more than ever as sharp as a face sculptured on a medal or a bas-relief: the face of a goddess disdainful of earthly contacts.

The Cretan notices it and he apologises: «What do you expect! After all I make my money from the Romans!...»

Syntyche's reply is as sharp as a sabre-cut: «And gold blunts the sword of national honour and freedom», and she says so in such a way and in such pure Latin that the man is dumbfounded...

Then he dares to ask: «But are you not Greek?»

«I am Greek. But you love the Romans. I am speaking to you in the language of your masters, not in mine, which is the language of our martyred Fatherland.»

The Cretan is embarrassed while the apostles silently rejoice at the lesson given to the praiser of Rome. And the Cretan changes the subject and asks by which means they will be going from Seleucia to Antioch.

«On foot, man» replies Peter. «But it is evening. And it will be night by the time you land...»

«There will be a place where we can sleep.»

«Of course. But you can sleep here until tomorrow.»

Judas Thaddeus, who has seen that they have already prepared everything necessary for a sacrifice to the gods, to be offered likely at their arrival in the port, says: «It is not necessary. We thank you for your kindness, but we prefer to land. Is that right, Simon?»

«Yes, it is. We also have our prayers to say, and it is... either you and your gods, or us and our God.»

«Do as you like. I would have liked to do a good turn to Theophilus' son.»

«And we would have liked to do one to the Son of God, convincing you that there is only one God. But you are a rock that will not move. As you can see, we are on the same standing. But perhaps we shall meet again one day and you may not be so persistent...» says the Zealot gravely.

Nicomedes makes a gesture as if he wished to say: Perhaps. A gesture of ironic carelessness concerning the invitation to acknowledge the true God and forsake the false one. He then goes to the pilot's place as the harbour is close at hand.

«Let us go below and get the chests. Let us do it by ourselves. I am dying to get away from this pagan stench» says Peter. And they all go below with the exception of Syntyche and John.

The two exiles are close to each other and are watching the breakwaters that are coming closer and closer.

«Syntyche, another step towards the unknown, another tug from the happy past, another agony, Syntyche... I cannot bear it any longer...»

Syntyche takes his hand. She is very pale and sorrowful. But she is still the strong woman who knows how to encourage people. «Yes, John, another tug, another agony. But do not say: another step towards the unknown... It is not right. We know what our mission is here. Jesus told us. So we are not going towards the unknown, on the contrary we blend more and more with what we know, with the Will of God. It is not even right to say: “another tug”. We are being united to His will. A tug separates. We are being united. So we are not

being pulled apart. We are only parting with the sensitive delights of our love for Him, our Master, reserving super-sensitive delights for ourselves, transferring love and duty to a supernatural level. Are you convinced that it is so? You are? Well, you must not even say: “another agony”. Agony presupposes impending death. But by reaching a spiritual level to make it our abode, our atmosphere and our food, we do not die, “we live”. Because what is spiritual, is eternal. We therefore rise to a more lively life, an anticipation of the great Life in Heaven. So, cheer up! Forget that you are the man-John, and remember that you are destined to Heaven. Reason, act, think and hope only as a citizen of that immortal Fatherland...»

The others come back with their loads, when the ship is entering the large port of Seleucia majestically.

«And now let us make off as quickly as possible, to the first hotel we come across. There must be some in the neighbourhood, and tomorrow... by boat or by cart we will go to our destination.»

The ship docks by directions given by whistling and the gangway is lowered

Nicomedes approaches the departing passengers.

«Goodbye, man. And thank you» says Peter on behalf of everybody.

«Goodbye, Israelites. And I thank you. If you go along that street you will find lodgings at once. Goodbye.»

The apostles come down on this side, and he goes in the opposite direction, and while Peter and the others, laden like porters, go to rest, the heathen begins his useless rite...

321. From Seleucia to Antioch.

[No date].

«You will certainly find a cart at the market. If you want mine, I will give it to you, in memory of Theophilus. If I am a happy man, I owe it to him. He defended me because he was a just man. And one cannot forget certain things» says the old hotel-keeper standing before the apostles in the early morning

sunshine.

«The trouble is that we would be keeping your cart for several days... And in any case who would drive it? I can manage with a donkey... But a horse...»

«But it's the same, man! I won't give you a fiery colt, but a wise draught horse, as good as a lamb. And you will go in a short time and without any difficulty. You will be at Antioch by the ninth hour, also because the horse is familiar with the road and will go by itself. You will give it back to me when you want, without any interest on my side, as I am interested only in doing something pleasant to Theophilus' son, and you can tell him that I am always indebted to him, that I remember-him and I am his servant.»

«What shall we do?» Peter asks his companions. «Whatever you think is better. You decide and we will obey.»

«Shall we try with the horse? I am thinking of John... and also to be quick... I feel as if I am taking a man to the scaffold and I am dying to see it all over...»

«You are right» they all say.

«Well, I will take it, man.»

«And I am delighted to give it to you. I am going to prepare the vehicle.»

The hotel-keeper goes away. Peter can now get the load off his chest: «I have lost half of my lifetime in the past few days. How grievous! I wish I had Elijah's chariot, the mantle taken by Elisha, anything that is quick in doing things... And above all, at the cost of suffering death myself, I would have liked to give something that might comfort those poor wretches, making them forget... I don't know!... In a few words, something that would not make them suffer so much... But if I find out who is the main cause of all this grief, I am no longer Simon of Jonah, if I don't wring his neck like a wet cloth. I don't mean... killing him. No! But I'll squeeze him as he squeezed joy and life out of those two poor people...»

«You are right. It is very sorrowful. But Jesus says that we must forgive affronts...» says James of Alphaeus.

«Had they given offence to me, I would forgive... And I could. I am strong and sound, and if anybody offends me, I have enough strength to react against grief. But poor John! No, I cannot forget an affront to the man redeemed by the Lord, to a man who is dying broken-hearted...»

«I am thinking of the moment when we shall be saying goodbye to him...» says Andrew with a sigh.

«So do I. It's a fixed idea and it torments me more and more as that moment draws near...» whispers Matthew.

«Let us do it as quickly as possible, for goodness sake» says Peter.

«No, Simon. Forgive me, if I point out to you that you are wrong in wanting that. Your love for your neighbour is becoming devious and that must not happen to you, as you are always righteous» says the Zealot calmly laying a hand on Peter's shoulder.

«Why, Simon? You are learned and kind. Show me where I am wrong, and if I see that I am at fault, I will say to you: "You are right."»

«Your love is becoming unwholesome because it is changing into selfishness.»

«How? I am grieved over them, and I am selfish?»

«Yes, brother, because by excess of love – every excess is disorder and thus leads to sin – you are becoming cowardly. *You do not want to suffer seeing other people suffer.* That is selfishness, my brother in the name of the Lord.»

«That is true! You are right! And I thank you for telling me. That is what should be done among good companions. Well. I will no longer be in a hurry... But tell me the truth, is it not a pitiful situation?»

«It is indeed...» they all say.

«How shall we leave them?»

«I would say that we should leave them after Philip has given them hospitality... we could remain for some time in Antioch, hiding ourselves, calling on Philip to find out how they are adjusting themselves...» suggests Andrew.

«No. Such sudden parting would make them suffer too much» says James of Alphaeus.

«Well, let us take part of Andrew's suggestion. We will remain in Antioch, but in Philip's house. And for a few days we will go and visit them, but less and less frequently, until we stop going» says the other James.

«We would renew their sorrow and disappoint them bitterly. No. It must not be done» says Thaddeus. «What shall we do, Simon?»

«Ah! As far as I am concerned, I would rather be in their position than have to say: “I bid you goodbye”» says Peter who is downhearted.

«I suggest this. Let us go with them to Philip's house and remain there. Then we will all go to Antigonea. It is a pleasant place... And we will stay there. When they have become acclimatised, we will withdraw, in a sorrowful but manly manner. That is what I would say. Unless Simon Peter has received different instructions from the Master» says Simon Zealot.

«Me? No. He said to me: “Do everything well, with love, without being sluggish, but without rushing, in the way which you think is best.” So far I think I have done so. There is only one thing: I said I was a fisherman!... But if I had not said that, he would not have allowed me on the deck.»

«Don't have silly scruples, Simon. They are snares of the demon to upset you» says Thaddeus comforting him.

«Yes. Quite right! I think he is around us as never before, creating obstacles and endeavouring to frighten us to drive us to cowardly actions» says the apostle John, and he concludes in a low voice: «I think he wanted to drive those two to despair by keeping them in Palestine... and now that they are avoiding his snares, he is avenging himself on us... I feel that he is around me like a snake hiding in the grass... And I have felt him like that for months... But here is the hotel-keeper coming from one side and John with Syntyche from the other. I will tell you the rest later, when we are alone, if it is of interest to you.»

In fact a sturdy cart drawn by a strong horse is coming forward on one side of the yard, driven by the host, while the two disciples are coming towards them on the other side.

«Is it time to go?» asks Syntyche.

«Yes, it is. Are you well covered, John. Is your pain improving?»

«Yes. I am enveloped in woollen garments and the ointment has helped me.»

«Get on, then, and we shall be with you in a moment.»

... And when they have finished loading, and everyone is in the cart, they go out through the wide door, after being repeatedly assured by the host of the docility of the horse. They cross a square as pointed out to them and take a road near the walls until they go out through a gate and they then proceed along a deep canal first and later along the river. It is a fine well kept road, running northeastwards,

following the turns of the river. On the other side there are mountains, the slopes, creeks and gorges of which are very green, and in the most sunny spots one can see the swollen gems of many shrubs in the undergrowth thickets.

«How many myrtles!» exclaims Syntyche.

«And laurels!» adds Matthew.

«Near Antioch there is a place sacred to Apollo» says John of Endor. «Perhaps the winds have blown the seeds as far as here...»

«Perhaps. But the whole area here is full of lovely plants» says the Zealot.

«Since you have been here, do you think that we shall pass near Daphne?»

«We must. You will see one of the most beautiful valleys in the world. Apart from the obscene cult, which has degenerated into dirty orgies, it is a valley of earthly paradise, and if Faith enters it, it will become a true paradise. Oh! how much good you will be able to do here! I wish you hearts as fertile as the soil...» says the Zealot to arouse consoling thoughts in the two disciples. John lowers his head and Syntyche sighs.

The horse trots with a rhythmical step and Peter does not speak, tense as he is in the strain of driving, although the horse proceeds safely without any need of guidance or spur. They travel thus quite fast until they stop at a bridge to eat and let the horse rest. The midday sun is shining and all the beauty of a most beautiful country is visible.

«But... I prefer this to the sea...» says Peter looking around. «What a storm!»

«The Lord prayed for us. I felt that He was near us when we were praying on the deck. As close as if He were among us...» says John smiling.

«I wonder where He is. I have no peace thinking that He has no clothes... And if He gets wet? And what will He eat? He is quite capable of fasting...»

«You may rest assured that He does so to help us» says James of Alphaeus confidently.

«And for other reasons as well. Our brother has been very depressed for some time. I think that He mortifies Himself continuously to defeat the world» says Thaddeus.

«You mean the demon who is in the world» says James of Zebedee.

«It's the same thing.»

«But He will not succeed. My heart is weighed down with fear...» says Andrew with a sigh.

«Oh! Now that we are far away, things will improve!» says John of Endor rather bitterly.

«Don't you believe that! You and Syntyche were nothing compared to the “great faults” of the Messiah according to the mighty ones in Israel» says Thaddeus sharply.

«Are you sure? Over and above all my troubles, I have also this aching pain in my heart: that I have harmed Jesus by coming to Him. If I were sure that it is not so, I would not suffer so much» says John of Endor.

«Do you think that I am sincere, John?» asks Thaddeus.

«Yes, I do.»

«Then, in the name of God and mine I assure you that you have given Jesus but one sorrow: that of having to send you here on a mission. You have nothing to do with all His past, present and future griefs.»

The first smile, after sad days of gloomy melancholy brightens the hollow cheeks of John of Endor, who says: «What a relief you give me! The day seems brighter to me, my disease less troublesome, and my heart is more comforted... Thank you, Judas of Alphaeus, thank you!»

They get into the cart again and after crossing the bridge they go along the other bank of the river, following the road that goes straight to Antioch, through a very fertile area.

«There you are! Daphne is in that poetic valley with its temple and thickets. And over there, in the plain, there is Antioch and its towers on the walls. We will enter the gate near the river. Lazarus' house is not very far from the walls. His most beautiful houses have been sold. This one is left, once it was the place where Theophilus' servants and clients stopped and rested and it has many stables and granaries. Philip lives in it. A good old soul faithful to Lazarus. You will be at home there. And we will go to Antigonea where the house is in which Eucheria lived with her children, who were very young then...»

«This town is well fortified, isn't it?» asks Peter, who is now relaxing, as he has

realised that his test as a charioteer has been successful.

«Yes, very. Walls of great height and width, over one hundred towers, which, as you can see, look like giants standing on the walls, with impassable moats at their feet. And mount Silpius has also lent its tops to assist the defence system, as a buttress in the weakest part of the walls... Here is the gate. It is better if you stop and go in holding the horse by the bit. I will guide you as I know the way...»

They go through the gate watched by Romans.

The apostle John says: «I wonder whether the soldier of the Fish Gate is here... Jesus would be happy to know...»

«We will look for him. But go on now» orders Peter, who is obviously worried at the idea of going to an unknown house.

John obeys without speaking; he only looks carefully at every soldier he sees.

After a short distance, there is a strongly built but simple house, that is, a high wall with no windows. There is only a large door in the central part of the wall.

«Here we are. Stop» says the Zealot.

«Oh! Simon! Be good! Will you speak now?!»

«Yes, I will, if it is going to make you happy» and the Zealot knocks at the heavy door. He makes himself known as a messenger from Lazarus. He goes in by himself. He comes out with an old dignified man, who bows profusely and orders a servant to open the gate and let the cart go in. And he apologises for letting them all go in there and not through the main door.

The cart stops in a large yard with porches, well kept, with a huge plane-tree in each of the four corners and two in the centre sheltering a well and watering trough for horses.

«Take care of the horse» the steward orders the servant. He then says to the guests: «Please come with me and may the Lord be blessed for sending me His servants and the friends of my master. Your servant is at your disposal, please give me your orders.»

Peter blushes because the steward's words and bows are addressed mainly to him, and he does not know what to say... The Zealot comes to his rescue.

«The disciples of the Messiah of Israel, of whom Lazarus of Theophilus speaks to you, and who from now on will live in your house to serve the Lord, need nothing but rest. Will you show them their rooms?»

«Oh? There are rooms always ready for pilgrims, as in the days of my mistress. Come...» And followed by everybody he goes along a corridor into a little yard at the end of which is the real house. He opens the door, goes along a passage, then he turns to the right. There is a staircase. They go upstairs, where there is another corridor with rooms on both sides.

«Here you are. And may your stay be a pleasant one. I am now going to order water and some linen. May God be with you» says the old man and he goes away.

They open the windows of the rooms they choose. The walls and towers of Antioch are opposite the rooms on one side; the peaceful yard adorned with creeping rose-bushes, which are now bare because of the season, can be seen from the rooms on the other side of the corridor.

And at last, after so much travelling, a house, a room, a bed... A resting place for some, the final destination for others...

322. At Antigonea.

7th November 1945.

«My son Ptolmai has come to the market. He is going back to Antigonea today at the sixth hour. It is a mild day. Do you still wish to go as you had planned?» asks old Philip while serving hot milk to his guests.

«We shall certainly go. When did you say?»

«At the sixth hour. You can come back tomorrow, if you wish, or the evening before the Sabbath, if you prefer so. All the Hebrew servants and those who have embraced our faith come for the Sabbath service.»

«We will do that. And that place may still be chosen as the residence for these two.»

«I will be pleased even if I lose them. Because it is a wholesome place. And you could do much good among the servants, some of whom are still the ones left by our master. Some are there through the bounty of our blessed mistress who ransomed them from cruel masters. So they are not all Israelites. But by now they are not pagans either. I am referring to the women. All the men have been circumcised. Do not disdain them... But they are still very far from the justice of Israel. The saints of the Temple would be scandalised at them, as they are perfect...»

«Of course! They would indeed! Well! They will now be able to improve by breathing in wisdom and goodness from the messengers of the Lord... Have you heard how much you have to do?» concludes Peter, addressing the two.

«We will do it. We will not disappoint the Master» promises Syntyche. And she goes out to prepare what is necessary to take.

John of Endor asks Philip: «Do you think that at Antigonea I could do some good also to other people, as a teacher?»

«Much good. Old Plautus died three months ago and the children of the Gentiles have no school now. With regard to the Jews, there is no master for them because all our people keep away from that place, which is close to Daphne. It would take one like... like Theophilus... Without rigidity for... for...»

«Yes, without Pharisaism, you mean» concludes Peter promptly.

«That's it... yes... I do not want to criticise... But I think... It's of no use cursing... It would be better if they helped... As our mistress used to do... she brought more people to the Law with her smiles and in a better way than a rabbi.»

«That is why the Master sent me here! I am the man with the right qualifications... Oh! I will do His will. Till I breathe my last. I now believe, I firmly believe that my mission is nothing but a mission of predilection. I am going to tell Syntyche. You will see that we will stay there... I am going to tell her» and he goes out, full of life as he had not been for a long time.

«Most High Lord, I thank You and bless You! He will still suffer, but not so much as previously... Ah! What a relief?» exclaims Peter. He then feels that it is his duty to give Philip some kind of explanation, as best he can, of his joy: «You must realise that John was made the object of the attacks of the... “rigid ones” in Israel... You call them “rigid ones”...»

«Ah! I see! He was persecuted for political reasons like... like...» and he looks at the Zealot.

«Yes, like me and more, and for other reasons as well. Because he provokes them not only because he is of a different caste, but also because he belongs to the Messiah. So – and let this be said once for all – both he and Syntyche are entrusted to your loyalty... Do you understand?»

«Yes, I do. And I know how to behave.»

«What will you say they are?»

«Two teachers recommended by Lazarus of Theophilus, he is a teacher for boys, and she for girls. I see that she embroiders and has a loom... A considerable amount of needle work is done and sold in Antioch by foreigners. But it is rough and coarse stuff. Yesterday I saw that she had a piece of work which reminded me of my good mistress... They will be in great demand...»

«Once again may the Lord be praised» says Peter.

«Yes. That will soothe our grief in parting.»

«Are you going to leave already?»

«We must. We have been delayed by the storm. At the beginning of Shebat we must be with the Master. He is already waiting for us, because we are late» explains Thaddeus.

They part, each attending to his own business, that is, Philip goes where a woman calls him, the apostles to a high ground, in the sunshine.

«We could leave the day after the Sabbath. What do you say?» asks James of Alphaeus. «As far as I am concerned!... I don't mind!... Every morning I get up tormented by the idea that Jesus is alone, without clothes, without anyone looking after Him, and every night I go to bed with the same fixed idea. But we shall decide today.»

«Tell me. But was the Master aware of everything? I have been wondering for days how He knew that we were going to meet the Cretan, how he could foresee John's and Syntyche's work, how... That is... many things» says Andrew.

«Actually I think that the Cretan stops at Seleucia on fixed dates. And perhaps Lazarus told Jesus, and so He decided to leave without waiting until Passover...» explains the Zealot.

«Indeed! That's right. And how will John manage at Passover?» asks James of Alphaeus.

«Like every other Israelite...» says Matthew.

«No. That would mean falling into the wolf's mouth!»

«Not at all! Who is going to find him out among so many people?»

«The Iscar... Oh! What have I said! Forget about it. It's only a trick of my mind...» Peter is flushed and sad, because he has spoken.

Judas of Alphaeus lays a hand on his shoulder and smiling with his severe smile, he says: «Never mind! We are all thinking of the same thing. But we won't tell anybody. And let us bless the Eternal Father for diverting John's mind from this thought.»

They are all silent, engrossed in thought. But as they are true Israelites, the thought of how the exiled disciple will be able to celebrate Passover in Jerusalem worries them... and they begin to speak about it again.

«I think that Jesus will see to it. Perhaps John already knows. We have only got to ask him» says Matthew.

«No, don't. Don't put desires and thorns where peace is just springing up» begs the apostle John.

«Yes. It is better to ask the Master Himself» confirms James of Alphaeus.

«When shall we see Him? What do you think?» asks Andrew.

«Oh! If we leave the day after the Sabbath, by the end of the moon we shall certainly be at Ptolemais...» says James of Zebedee.

«If we find a ship...» remarks Judas Thaddeus. And his brother adds: «And if there is no storm.»

«There are always ships leaving for Palestine. And if we pay, we will call at Ptolemais, even if the ship is heading for Joppa. Have you any money left, Simon?» the Zealot asks Peter.

«Yes, I have, although that thief, the Cretan, fleeced me in no uncertain manner, notwithstanding his protestations that he wanted to do a favour to Lazarus. But I have to pay for the custody of the boat and the keeping of Antonius... I do not want to touch the money given to me for John and Syntyche. It is sacred. At the

cost of starving, I will leave it as it is.»

«That is the right thing. That man is very ill. He thinks that he will be able to teach. I think he will be ill all the time, and soon...» states the Zealot.

«I am of the same opinion. Syntyche will be busier preparing ointments than working» confirms James of Zebedee.

«What do you think of that ointment? What a wonderful thing! Syntyche told me that she wants to make it here and use it to become familiar with local families» says John.

«A very good idea! A sick person who is cured always becomes a disciple and relatives follow suit» states Matthew.

«Oh! no! Certainly not» exclaims Peter.

«What? Do you mean that miracles do not attract people to the Lord?» Andrew asks him together with two or three companions.

«Oh! little babies! One might say that you have just come down from Heaven! But don't you see what they do to Jesus? Did Eli of Capernaum turn? Or Doras? Or Oshea of Korazim? Or Melkia of Bethsaida? And – excuse me you from Nazareth – the whole of Nazareth, after the five, six, ten miracles worked there, up to the last one for your nephew?» asks Peter.

Nobody replies, because it is the bitter truth.

«We have not found the Roman soldier yet. Jesus had given to understand...» says John after a little while.

«We will tell those who are staying. It will be another opportunity for them» replies the Zealot.

Philip comes back: «My son is ready. He finished early. He is with his mother who is preparing gifts for her grandchildren.»

«Your daughter-in-law is good, isn't she?»

«She is. She consoled me for the loss of my Joseph. She is like a daughter to me. She was Eucheria's maid, and was brought up by her. Come and have something to eat before leaving. The others are already taking something.»...

... And they trot towards Antigonea, preceded by the cart of Ptolmai, Philip's grandson... They soon reach the little town. Situated as it is among fertile

gardens, shielded from winds by chains of mountains around it, far enough not to oppress it, but sufficiently close to protect it and pour on to it the scents of their woods of resinous and essential plants, full of sunshine, it cheers up one's sight and heart only by going through it.

Lazarus' gardens are in the southern part of the town and are preceded by an avenue, which is now bare, along which are the houses of the gardeners. Low but well kept houses, from the doors of which children and women appear watching curiously and greeting smiling. The different races can be told by the different faces.

As soon as he enters the gate, where the estate begins, Ptolmai cracks his whip in a special way when passing in front of each house; it must be a signal. And the inhabitants of each house, after hearing it, go into their houses and then come out, closing the doors and walking along the avenue, behind the two carts, as the horses are ambling and they stop at the centre of radial paths stretching in every direction like the spokes of a wheel, among numberless fields arranged as flower beds, some of which are bare, some full of evergreens, protected by laurels, acacias or similar trees and by other trees which ooze odoriferous milklike juices and resins through cuts in their trunks. There is in the air a mixed scent of balsamic, resinous, aromatic fragrances. There are beehives everywhere, as well as irrigation vats where show-white doves are drinking. And in special areas white hens are scratching about on the bare ground, which has just been hoed, while some girls are watching over them.

Ptolmai cracks his whip repeatedly, until all the subjects of the little kingdom have gathered round the arrivals. He then begins his little speech: «Listen. Philip, our head and the father of my father, has sent and recommends these holy people from Israel, who have come here by the will of our master, and may God be always with him and his family. We have been complaining because there was no rabbi here to speak to us. Now the bounty of God and of our master, who although so far is so affectionate to us – may God give him the welfare that he gives his servants – have procured for us what our hearts desire so keenly. The Messiah promised to peoples has risen in Israel. They had told us at the Feasts in the Temple and in the house of Lazarus. But now the time of grace has really come because the King of Israel has taken care of His lowest servants and has sent His ministers to bring us His words. These are His disciples and two of them will live with us, either here or in Antioch, teaching us the Wisdom of Heaven and the science that is necessary on the earth. John, a

schoolmaster and a disciple of Christ, will teach our children the former and the latter wisdom. Syntyche, a disciple and a teacher of needlework, will teach our girls the science of the love of God and the art of needlework. Welcome them as a blessing from Heaven, and love them as Lazarus of Theophilus and Eucheria loves them – glory to their souls and peace – and as the daughters of Theophilus love them: Martha and Mary, our beloved mistresses and disciples of Jesus of Nazareth, the Rabbi of Israel, the promised King.»

The little group of men, wearing short tunics and holding garden tools in their earthy hands, and of women and children of every age, listen in utter astonishment, they then whisper and finally bow their heads very low.

Ptolmai begins to introduce them: «Simon of Jonah, the head of the messengers of the Lord; Simon the Cananean, a friend of our master; James and Judas, brothers of the Lord; James and John, Andrew and Matthew» and then to the apostles and disciples:

«Anne, my wife, of the tribe of Judas, as my mother was, because we are pure Israelites and we came here with Eucheria of Judas. Joseph, the son consecrated to the Lord, and Theocheria, our firstborn, who is called after our just masters, a wise daughter who loves God as a true Israelite. Nicolaus and Dositeus. Nicolaus is a Nazirite; Dositeus, our third born, has been married for several years (he says that with a big sigh) to Hermione. Come here, woman...»

A very young swarthy woman comes forward holding an unweaned babe in her arms.

«Here she is. She is the daughter of a proselyte and a Greek mother. My son saw her at Alexandrosce in Phoenicia, when he was there on business... and wanted her... and Lazarus did not object, on the contrary he said to me: “Better so than debauched”. And it is better. But I wanted someone with Jewish blood...»

Poor Hermione has lowered her head as if she were accused. Dositeus trembles with anger and suffers. Anne, his mother, looks at him with sorrowful eyes...

Although the youngest of all the apostles, John feels that it is necessary to raise the humiliated spirits and says: «In the Kingdom of the Lord there are no longer Greeks or Israelites, Romans or Phoenicians, but only the children of God. When you learn the Word of God from those who have come here, your heart will rise to a new light and this woman will no longer be “the foreigner”, but the

disciple of our Lord Jesus, like yourself and all the rest.»

Hermione raises her mortified head and smiles gratefully at John and the same expression of gratitude can be seen on the faces of Dositeus and Anne.

Ptolmai replies gravely: «God grant it, because apart from her origin, I cannot blame my daughter-in-law for anything. The child in her arms is Alphaeus, her last born, called after her father, a proselyte. The little girl with sky-blue eyes and ebony curls is Myrthica, who was called after Hermione's mother, and this one, the first born, is Lazarus, as our master wanted, and the other one is Hermas.»

«The fifth must be called Ptolmai and the sixth Anne, to tell the Lord and the world that your heart has opened to new understanding» says John again.

Ptolmai bows without speaking. He then resumes the introductions: «These are two brothers from Israel: Miriam and Silvian, of the tribe of Naphtali. And these are Elbonides, a Danite, and Simeon, a Judaeen. And here are the proselytes, Romans or sons of Romans, whom Eucheria's charity redeemed from slavery and heathenism: Lucius, Marcellus, Solon the son of Elateus.»

«A Greek name» remarks Syntyche.

«From. Thessalonica. The slave of a servant of Rome» – and there is manifest contempt in saying “servant of Rome” – «Eucheria took him with his dying father, in troubled times, and if his father died a heathen, Solon is a proselyte... Priscilla, come forward with your children...»

A tall thin woman with an aquiline nose comes forward pushing a girl and a boy, with two lovely little girls hanging to her skirt.

«This is Solon's wife, a freedwoman of a Roman lady now dead, and this is Marius, Cornelia, and the twins Mary and Martilla. Priscilla is experienced in essences. Amiclea, come with your children. She is the daughter of proselytes. And her boys Cassius and Theodorus are also proselytes. Tecla, don't hide yourself. She is Marcellus' wife. She is grieved because she is sterile. She is the daughter of proselytes, too. And these are the farmers. Let us go to the gardens now. Come.»

And he leads them through the vast estate followed by the gardeners who explain the various cultivations and work, while the girls go back to their hens, which have taken advantage of their absence to trespass on to other ground.

Ptolmai explains: «They are brought here to free the soil from grubs before sowing the yearly cultivations.»

John of Endor smiles at the cackling hens and says: «They look like those I had once...» and he bends throwing bread crumbs taken from his sack, until he is surrounded by pullets and he laughs because a cheeky one snatches the bread from his fingers.

«That's not so bad!» exclaims Peter nudging Matthew and pointing to John who is playing with the chicken and to Syntyche who is speaking Greek to Solon and Hermione.

They then go back to the house of Ptolmai, who explains: «This is the place. But if you want to teach, we can make room. Are you staying here or...»

«Yes, Syntyche! Here! It's lovelier! Antioch oppresses me with recollections...» John begs his companion in a low voice.

«Of course... As you wish. Providing you are well. It is all the same to me. I no longer look back... Only forward... Cheer up, John! We shall be all right here. Children, flowers, doves, hens for us, poor human beings. And for our souls... the joy of serving the Lord. What do you all say?» she asks addressing all the apostles.

«We are of the same opinion as you, woman.»

«Well, that is settled.»

«Very well. We will leave with relieved minds...»

«Oh! Don't go away! I will not see you again! Why so early? Why?...» John relapses into a state of depression.

«But we are not going away now! We are staying until you are...» Peter does not know what to say John will be, and to hide his tears he embraces weeping John endeavouring to console him thus...

323. Farewell to Antioch after Preaching.

8th November 1945.

1 The apostles are once again in the house at Antioch with the two disciples and all the men from Antigonea, who are not wearing their clothes tucked up to work, but have on their long best garments. I thus understand that it is the Sabbath.

Philip begs the apostles to speak to everybody at least once before their departure, which is now imminent.

«On what?»

«On anything you like. You have heard our conversation during the past days. You may speak accordingly.»

The apostles look at one another. Whose duty is it? Peter's, of course. He is the head! But Peter would rather not speak but surrender the honour to James of Alphaeus or to John of Zebedee. And only when he sees that they are inflexible, he makes up his mind to speak.

2 «Today in the synagogue we heard the explanation of chapter 52 of Isaiah. A learned comment according to the world, a defective one according to Wisdom. But the commentator is not to be blamed, because he gave what he could within the limits of his own wisdom: without the knowledge of the Messiah and of the new Time brought by Him. But let us not find fault with him, let us instead pray that he may achieve the knowledge of these two graces and accept them without difficulty. You told me that at Passover you heard some people speak of the Master with faith, some with sneering words. And that only because of the great faith that fills the hearts of the house of Lazarus, all their hearts, you were able to bear the unease that the innuendoes of other people caused to your hearts, particularly because these other people were rabbis of Israel. But to be learned does not mean to be holy or to possess the Truth. And this is the Truth: Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah, the Saviour of Whom the Prophets speak, and the last of them went to rest in Abraham's bosom only recently, after his glorious martyrdom, which he suffered for the sake of justice. John the Baptist said, and those who heard his words are here now: "There is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world." His words were believed by the most humble of those present, because humility helps to reach Faith, whereas it is difficult for proud people – laden as they are with unnecessary things – to reach

the mountain top where chaste bright Faith dwells. Those humble people, both because they were such and because they believed, deserved to be the first in the army of the Lord Jesus. You can thus see how necessary humility is in order to attain instant faith, and how faith is rewarded, particularly when one believes against adverse appearances. I exhort and stimulate you to possess these two qualities and you will then be in the army of the Lord and will conquer the Kingdom of Heaven... It is your turn, Simon Zealot. I have spoken. Please continue.»

3 The Zealot, caught so suddenly and so clearly pointed out as the second speaker, can but move forward without delay or complaint. And he says:

«I will continue the sermon of Simon Peter, the head of us all by the will of the Lord. And I will continue taking up the subject of chapter 52 of Isaiah, as seen by one who knows the Incarnate Truth, Whose servant he is for good. It says: “Awake, clothe yourself in strength, Zion, put on your richest clothes, city of the Holy One.” And that is how it should really be. Because when a promise is fulfilled, peace is made, punishment comes to an end, and the time of joy comes; hearts and towns should put on their best clothes and raise their mortified foreheads, realising that they are no longer hated, defeated, beaten, but are instead loved and freed. We are not here to institute proceedings against Jerusalem. Charity, the first of all virtues, forbids it. Let us not watch the hearts of other people, let us, instead, look at our own. Let us clothe our hearts in strength by means of that faith of which Simon has spoken and let us put on our richest clothes because our age-old faith in the Messiah is now crowned by the real fact. The Holy Messiah, the Word of God is really among us. And both souls and bodies have evidence of this: the former hear the words of Wisdom, which fortify them and infuse holiness and peace, the latter, thanks to the Holy One, to Whom everything is granted by the Father, are released from the most dreadful diseases, even from death, so that the hills and valleys of Israel, our Fatherland, may resound with hosannas to the Son of David and to the Most High Who has sent His Word, as He had promised the Patriarchs and Prophets. I, who am speaking to you, was a leper, destined to die, after years of unrelenting distress, in the brutal solitude familiar to lepers. A man said to me: “Go to Him, to the Rabbi of Nazareth, and you will be cured.” I had faith. I went. I was cured. In my body. In my heart. The former was freed from the disease that separates lepers from other men. The latter was freed from the hatred that separates from God. And with a new spirit, from a troubled, sick exile I became His servant, called to the happy mission of going among men, loving them in His Name,

teaching them the one and only necessary knowledge: that Jesus of Nazareth is the Saviour and that blessed are those who believe in Him. It's your turn to speak now, o James of Alphaeus.»

4 «I am the brother of the Nazarene. My father and His were brothers, born of the same mother. And yet I cannot say that I am His brother, but His servant. Because the paternity of Joseph, my father's brother, was a spiritual paternity and I solemnly tell you; that the Most High, Whom we worship, is the true Father of our Master Jesus. God allowed the Second Person of God One and Trine to become incarnate and to come upon the earth, remaining however God and always united to the Persons Who dwell in Heaven. Because God, Who is infinitely Almighty can do that. And He does it out of Love, which is His nature. Jesus of Nazareth is our brother, men, because he was born of a woman, and is like us in His humanity. He is our Master because He is the Wise One, He is the very Word of God and has come to speak to us to take us to God. And He is our God, being One with the Father and the Holy Spirit, with Whom He is always united in love, power and nature. May this Truth, which the Just One, my relative, was granted to know through clear evidence, become also your possession. And when the world will endeavour to tear you away from the Christ, saying: “He is just an ordinary man”, reply: “No. He is the Son of God, He is the Star born of Jacob, He is the Sceptre that arises in Israel, He is the Ruler.” Let nothing deter you. That is Faith. It's your turn, Andrew.»

5 «That is Faith. I am a poor fisherman of the lake of Galilee, and when fishing in the silent nights, in the light of the stars, I had silent conversations with myself. I used to say: “When will He come? Will I be still alive? Many years are still missing, according to the prophecy.” For man, whose life is short, even a few dozen years are as long as centuries... I used to ask myself: “How will He come? Where? From whom?” And my dull human mind made me dream of royal splendour, of royal abodes, processions, clangour, power and unbearable majesty... And I would say: “Who will be able to look at this great King?” I thought that He would be more terrifying, in His manifestation, than Jehovah Himself on Mount Sinai. And I used to say: “The Hebrews saw the mountain lighten, but they were not burned to ashes, because the Eternal Father was beyond the clouds. But here He will look at us with mortal eyes and we shall die... I was a disciple of the Baptist. And when we were not fishing I used to go to him with other companions. It was a day of this month... The banks of the Jordan were crowded with people who shivered when hearing the words of the Baptist. I had noticed a young handsome man come calmly towards us along a

path. His garments were plain, His countenance kind. He seemed to be asking for love and to be giving love. His blue eyes rested for a moment on me, and I felt something that I have never felt again. I felt as if my soul were being caressed, as if I were being lightly touched by the wings of angels. For a moment I felt that I was so far away from the earth, so different, that I said: "I shall die now! This is God calling my soul." But I did not die. I was fascinated contemplating the young unknown man, whose blue eyes were now staring at the Baptist. And the Baptist turned round, ran to Him and bowed. They spoke to each other. And as John's voice was as loud as thunder, their mysterious words reached me, who was listening, tense as I was in the keen desire to know who the unknown young man was. My soul felt that He was different from everybody. They were saying: "I should be baptised by You... .. Never mind just now. It is necessary to fulfill all justice."... John had already said: "Someone will come and I am not fit to undo the straps of His sandals." He had already said: "There is among you, in Israel, One Whom you do not know. His winnowing-fan is already in His hand and He will clear His threshing-floor and He will burn the chaff in a fire that will never go out." I had in front of me a young man of the common people, whose countenance was mild and humble, and yet I felt that He was the One, Whose sandal-straps not even the Holy One in Israel, the last Prophet, the Precursor was fit to undo. I felt that He was the One, Whom we did not know. But I was not afraid. On the contrary, when John, after the enrapturing thunder of God and after the unimaginable brightness of the Light in the shape of a dove of peace, said: "Here is the Lamb of God", I cried: "I believe!" with the voice of my soul, rejoicing because I had foreseen the King Messiah in the young man who looked so mild and humble. Because of this faith I am His servant. Be so yourselves, and you will have peace. Matthew, it is your turn now to relate the other glories of the Lord.»

6 «I cannot use the same serene words of Andrew. He was a just man, I was a sinner. Therefore my word has not the joyful note of happiness, but it has the confident peace of a psalm. I was a sinner. A great sinner. I was living in utter error. I had hardened in it and I felt no discomfort. If at times the Pharisees or the head of the synagogue lashed me with their insults and reproaches, reminding me of God, the inexorable Judge, I was terrified for a moment... then I would relax thinking foolishly: "In any case I am as good as damned. Let me have a good time, therefore, as long as I can." And I sank deeper and deeper into sin. Two years ago an Unknown man, came to Capernaum in springtime. He was unknown also to me. He was in fact unknown to everybody, because He

was at the beginning of His mission. Only a few men knew who He really was: those whom you see here, and few more. I was greatly surprised at His demeanour, which was more chaste than a virgin's. That was the first thing that amazed me. I saw that He was austere and yet He was always willing to listen to the children who went to Him as bees fly to flowers. Their innocent games and ingenious words were His only relaxation. Then His power amazed me. He worked miracles. I said: "He is an exorciser, a holy man." I felt that I was so disgraceful as compared to Him, that I shunned Him. He was looking for me. Or that was my impression. Every time He passed near my bench He would look at me with His kind rather sad eyes. And every time I felt my torpid conscience start and it never fell back to the same level of stupor. One day, as people exalted His words, I felt like listening to Him. And hiding behind the corner of a house I heard Him speak to a little group of men. He spoke informally, on charity, which is like an indulgence with regard to our sins... As from that evening, I, the greedy hardhearted man, wanted my many sins to be forgiven by God. I did things secretly... But He knew that it was I, because He knows everything. Once I heard Him explain just chapter 52 of Isaiah: He said that the lewd and those whose hearts are not circumcised will not enter His Kingdom, the heavenly Jerusalem, and He promised that that Celestial City, the beauty of which He described so convincingly that I felt nostalgia for it, would belong to those who went to Him. And then... Oh! On that day His look was not a sad one, but a commanding one. He broke my heart, He stripped my soul, He cauterised this poor soul of mine, He took it in His hands and tortured it with His exacting love... and I had a new soul. Repentance and desire led me towards Him. He did not wait for me to say: "Have mercy, my Lord!" He said to me: "Follow Me!" The Mild One had defeated Satan in the sinner's heart. May this tell you, if anyone among you is worried because of his sins, that He is the good Saviour and that you must not shun Him, on the contrary, the more one is a sinner, the more one must go to Him with humility and repentance, in order to be forgiven. James of Zebedee, will you speak now?»

7 «I do not really know what to say. You have spoken and said what I would have said. Because that is the truth and it cannot be changed. I was with Andrew at the Jordan as well, but I only noticed Him when He was pointed out by the Baptist. But I believed at once, and when He left, after His bright manifestation, I was like one who after being on a sunny mountain top, is imprisoned in a dark jail. I was longing to find the Sun again. The world was dark, after the Light of God had appeared to me, and then had disappeared. I was alone among men. I

had satisfied my appetite, but I was hungry. While sleeping I was awake with my better part, and money, business, affections, everything had been left far behind my great desire for Him and nothing allured me. Like a child who has lost his mother I moaned: “Come back, Lamb of the Lord! Most High Lord, as You sent Raphael to guide Tobias, send Your angel to lead me to the way of the Lord, that I may find Him...!” And yet, when He appeared on the path coming from the desert, after we had been waiting for Him in vain for weeks, and we had been looking for Him anxiously, which vain efforts made us feel more sorely the loss of our John who had been arrested for the first time, I did not recognise Him at once. And now, my brothers in the Lord, I want to teach you another way to go to Him and recognise Him.

Simon of Jonah said that faith and humility are required to know Him. Simon Zealot has confirmed the absolute necessity of Faith to acknowledge in Jesus of Nazareth what He is in Heaven and on the earth, according to what has been said. And Simon Zealot needed a truly great faith, also on behalf of his incurable body. That is why Simon Zealot says that Faith and Hope are the means to attain the Son of God. James, the brother of the Lord, has mentioned the power of Strength to keep what has been found. The Strength that prevents the snares of the world and of Satan from undermining our Faith. Andrew has shown the necessity of joining a holy thirst for Justice to Faith, endeavouring to know and maintain the Truth, whatever be the holy mouth announcing it, not out of human pride to be learned, but out of desire to know God. The man who improves his mind in the Truth will find God. Matthew, once a sinner, has pointed out to you another way to attain God: to divest oneself of sensuality out of spirit of imitation, I would say by reflection of God, Who is infinite Purity. The first thing that impressed him, a sinner, was the “chaste demeanour” of the Unknown man who had come to Capernaum, and as if it had the power to revive his dead continence, he refrains first of all from sensual carnality, clearing the way for the coming of God and for the resurrection of the other dead virtues. From continence he passes on to mercy, from mercy to contrition, he then surpasses himself and arrives at union with God. “Follow Me.” “I am coming.” But his soul had already said: “I am coming”, and the Saviour had already said: “Follow Me”, when for the first time the Virtue of the Master had drawn the attention of the sinner. Imitate him. Because the experience of other people, even if painful, is a guide to avoid evil and find good for those who are of good will. As far as I am concerned, I say that the more man strives to live for the spirit, the more fit he is to recognise the Lord, and an angelic life favours that in the highest degree.

Of us disciples of John, he who recognised him, after His absence, was the virgin soul. Better than Andrew, he recognised Him, notwithstanding penance had altered the visage of the Lamb of God. So I say: “Be chaste to be able to recognise Him.” Judas, will you speak now?»

8 «Yes, be chaste to be able to recognise Him. But be chaste also to be able to keep Him within you with His Wisdom and His Love, with His whole Self. It is still Isaiah who in chapter 52 says: “Touch nothing unclean... purify yourselves, you who carry the vessels of the Lord.” Really, every soul that becomes His disciple is like a vase full of the Lord, and the body containing the soul is like one who carries the sacred vase to the Lord. God cannot be where there is impurity. Matthew told you how the Lord explained that nothing unclean or separated from God will be in the celestial Jerusalem. Yes. But it is necessary not to be unclean or separated from God, to be able to enter it. Wretched are those people who wait until the last hour to repent. They will not always have time to do so. Likewise those who now slander Him will have no time to make amends at the moment of His triumph, and therefore will not enjoy its fruit. Those who in the holy humble King hope to see an earthly monarch, and even more those who are afraid to see in Him an earthly monarch, will not be prepared for that hour; deceived and disappointed in their thoughts, which are not the thoughts of God, but poor human thoughts, they will sin even more. The humiliation of being the Man is upon Him. We must remember that. Isaiah says that all our sins mortify the Divine Person under common appearance. When I consider that the Word of God has around Himself, like a filthy crust, all the misery of mankind since it began to exist, I think with deep compassion and understanding of the suffering that His faultless soul must endure. The horror of a healthy man who was covered with the rags and filth of a leper. He is really pierced by our sins, and covered with sores by man's lust. His soul, living among us, must shudder with horror at such contact, as a body trembles with a high temperature. And yet He does not speak. He does not open His mouth to say: “You horrify Me.” But He opens it only to say: “Come to Me, that I may take away your sins.” He is the Saviour. In His infinite bounty He veiled His unbearable beauty. If He had appeared in all His beauty, as He is in Heaven, He would have reduced us to ashes, as Andrew said. But His beauty has become engaging, like a mild Lamb, in order to approach us and save us. His oppression, His condemnation will last until, consumed by the effort of being the perfect Man among imperfect men, He is raised above the multitude of those He has redeemed, in the triumph of His holy regality. God Who submits to death, to

take us to Life! May these thoughts make you love Him above all things. He is the Holy One. I can say so, as I was brought up with Him, together with James. And I say and will say so, ready to give my life to confirm this profession, so that men may believe in Him and have eternal Life. John of Zebedee, it is your turn to speak.»

9 «How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the messenger! Of the Messenger of peace, Who announces happiness and preaches salvation, Who says to Zion: “Your God is King!” And those feet have been walking untiringly for two years across the mountains in Israel, gathering the sheep of the herd of God, consoling, curing, forgiving, giving peace. His peace. I am really surprised at seeing that the hills and rivers of our Fatherland do not exult and rejoice at the caress of His feet. But what amazes me most is to see that the hearts of men do not exult or rejoice saying: “Praised be the Lord! The Expected One has come! Blessed be He Who comes in the name of the Lord!” He Who bestows graces and blessings, peace and health, and calls us to His Kingdom opening the way for us, above all He, Who pours forth love with every action of His, with every word, glance, breath... What is therefore this world as to be blind to the Light that is living among us? Which slabs, thicker than the stone closing the entrance of a sepulchre, has it placed on the sight of its soul not to see this Light? What mountain of sins has it on itself to be so oppressed, separated, blinded, deafened, chained, paralyzed as to stand inert before the Saviour? What is the Saviour? He is Light blended with Love. The mouths of my brothers have praised the Lord, they have recalled His works, and have pointed out the virtues to be put into practice in order to reach His way. I say to you: love. There is no other virtue that is greater or more like His Nature. *If you love, you will practise every virtue without difficulty, beginning from chastity.* It will be no burden to you to be chaste, because by loving Jesus you will love no one immoderately. You will be humble, because with the eyes of lovers you will see infinite perfections in Him, and thus you will not pride yourselves on your scanty ones. And you will believe. Who does not believe in him whom one loves? You will be contrite with sorrow that saves, because your sorrow will be honest, that is, you will be sorry for the pain you have caused Him, not for the pain deserved by you. And you will be strong. Oh! yes! When one is united to Jesus, one is strong! Strong against everything. You will be full of hope, because you will not doubt the Heart that loves you with His whole Self. And you will be wise. You will be everything. Love Him Who announces true happiness, Who preaches salvation, Who goes across mountains and valleys tirelessly, gathering the herd, on Whose

way there is Peace, as there is peace in His Kingdom, which is not of this world, but it is true as God is true. Flee from any direction that is not His. Get rid of every fog. Go to the Light. Do not be like the world which does not want to see the Light, which does not want to know it. But go to our Father, Who is the Father of lights, Who is infinite Light, go to Him through His Son, Who is the Light of the world, to enjoy God in the embrace of the Paraclete, Who is the brightness of the Lights in one only beatitude of love that concentrates the Three into. One. Infinite ocean of Love, without storms, without darkness, do receive us! All of us! Both those who are innocent and those who have repented. All of us! In Your Peace, forever! All of us! Everybody on the earth, that we may love You, God, and our neighbour, as You want. Everybody, in Heaven, that we may still and always love but You and the celestial inhabitants, that we may love also our brothers militant on the earth in expectation of peace, and like angels of love, we may defend them and support them in their struggles and temptations, so that they may be with You in Your Peace, for the eternal glory of our Lord Jesus the Saviour, the Lover of man, until the limitless limit of sublime annihilation.»

As usual, John soaring in his flights of love, draws with him souls where there is refined love and mystic silence.

10 Only after some time the listeners begin to speak. And Philip is the first, addressing Peter: «Is John, the teacher, not speaking?»

«He will always be speaking to you. Leave him now in his peace and let us be alone with him for a little while. Saba, do what I told you, and you as well, o good Berenice...»

They all go out and only the eight apostles and two disciples are left in the large room. There is grave silence. They all look rather pale, the apostles because they know what is about to happen, and the two disciples because they foresee it.

Peter opens his mouth to speak, but finds only these words: «Let us pray», and he intones the «Our Father». Then, and he is really so pale that he will probably not look like this when he dies, he says, going between the two and laying his hands on their shoulders: «We have now to part, my children. What shall I say to the Lord on your behalf? He will certainly be anxious to hear about your spiritual state.»

Syntyche falls on her knees covering her face with her hands and John imitates her. Peter has them at his feet and he instinctively caresses them biting his lips

not to yield to emotion.

John looks up, his face is heart-rending, and says: «You will tell the Master that we are doing His Will...» And Syntyche: «And ask Him to help us to fulfill it until the end...» Tears prevent longer sentences.

«All right. Let us kiss one another goodbye. This hour was to come...» also Peter stops speaking, choked by a lump in his throat.

«Bless us first» begs Syntyche. «No. Not I. Better one of Jesus' brothers...»

«No. You are the head. We shall bless with our kisses. Bless us all, both us who are leaving, and them, who are staying» says Thaddeus, and he is the first to kneel down.

And Peter, poor Peter, who is flushed both because of the effort to steady his voice, and by the excitement of stretching out his hands to bless the little group prostrated at his feet, repeats the Mosaic blessing, in a voice made harsher by weeping, almost the voice of an old man...

He then bends forward, kisses the forehead of the woman, as if she were his sister, lifts up and embraces John, kissing his cheek... and runs bravely out of the room, while the others imitate his gesture with the two who are staying...

The cart is ready outside. Only Philip and Berenice are present, and the servant who is holding the horse. Peter is already in the ...«You will tell the Master not to worry about those He recommended» says Philip to Peter.

«Tell Mary that I feel the peace of Eucheria since she has become a disciple» says Berenice to the Zealot in a low voice.

«Tell the Master, Mary, everybody, that we love them, and that... Goodbye! Goodbye! Oh! We will never see them again! Goodbye, brothers! Goodbye...»

The two disciples run out into the street... But the cart which left at a trot, has already gone round the corner... Disappeared...

«Syntyche!»

«John!»

«We are alone!»

«God is with us!... Come, poor John. The sun is setting, it will do you no good to stay here...»

«The sun has set forever, as far as I am concerned... Only in Heaven it will rise again.» And they go back to the room where they were before with the others. They lean on a table, weeping without restraint...

11 Jesus says:

«And the torture brought about by a man, wanted only by a wicked man, was accomplished, stopping as a river stops in a lake after completing its course. I wish to point out to you how also Judas of Alphaeus, although more nourished with wisdom than the others, explains the passage of Isaiah, dealing with My sufferings as Redeemer, in a human way. And everybody in Israel did the same, as they refused to accept the prophetic reality and they contemplated the prophecies on My sorrows as allegories and symbols. The grave error whereby in the hour of Redemption only very few people were able to still see the Messiah in the Convict. *Faith is not only a wreath of flowers. It contains also thorns. And he is holy who believes both in the hours of glory and in those of tragedy, and loves God whether He covers him with flowers or lays him on thorns.*»

324. Return of the Eight Apostles and Arrival at Achzib.

10th November 1945.

Jesus, Who is so pale, thin and sad that I would say that He must be suffering, is on the highest point of a little mountain, where there is also a village. But Jesus is not in the village, which although on the mountain top, stretches down the south-east slope. Jesus instead is on a little spur, on the highest point, facing northwest; actually more west than north.

As Jesus is looking in various directions, He can see an undulating chain of mountains the extreme north-west and southwest ends of which jut out into the sea, to the south-west with Mount Carmel, which fades away in the clear day, to the northwest with a sharp cape, similar to the ram of a ship, very much like our Apuanian Mountains particularly in respect of white rocky veins shining in the sunshine. Torrents and streams, all very full of water at this time of the year,

descend from this undulated chain of mountains and across the plain along the coast they flow into the sea. The river Kishon, the most significant of all of them, flows into the sea near the wide bay of Sicaminon, after forming a sheet of water at the confluence with another little stream near its mouth. The water of the streams glitter like topazes or sapphires in the midday sunshine of a clear day, while the sea looks like a huge sapphire veined with light strings of pearls.

Springtime in the south is already beginning to appear through the new leaves bursting from the open buds, tender shiny leaves, so fresh that I would call them virginal, unaware of dust, of storms, of bites of insects and of the contact of men. And the branches of almond-trees are already tufts of white pinkish foam, so soft and ethereal that they seem to be on the point of flying away from their native branches to sail like little clouds in the serene air. Also the fields in the plain, which is fertile although not large, delimited by the north-west and south-west capes, are verdant with corn, which makes them a pleasant sight, whereas shortly before they were bare.

Jesus is looking. Three roads can be seen from where He stands. One comes from the village and ends where He is: a narrow road suitable only for pedestrians and two other roadways, which descend from the village forking in opposite directions, towards north-west and south-west.

How sickly Jesus looks! There are more traces of penance on His face now than when He fasted in the desert. He had then grown pale, but He was still young and vigorous. He is now worn out by complex suffering that crushes both physical and moral strength. His eyes are sad, sweetly and severely sad at the same time. His thin cheeks enhance even more the spirituality of His profile, of His high forehead, long straight nose, and lips absolutely devoid of sensuality. An angelical face excluding all materiality. His beard is longer than usual, and has grown on His cheeks becoming mixed with His long hair, which hangs down over His ears, so that of His face one can only see His forehead, eyes, nose and His thin cheek-bones as pale as ivory without the least hint of colour. His hair is ruffled and dull and as a souvenir of the cave in which He has been, there are little parts of dry leaves and twigs entangled in it. His creased dusty tunic and mantle also bear witness to the wild Place in which they were worn without ever being changed.

Jesus is looking around... The midday sunshine is warming Him and He seems to enjoy it because He avoids the shade of some oaktrees to stand in the sunshine, but although the sun is bright and clear it does not enliven His dusty

hair or His tired eyes; neither does it tinge His emaciated face.

It is not the sun that restores or brightens Him up, but it is the sight of His dear apostles who are coming up gesticulating and looking towards the village from the north-west road, the less steep one. His metamorphosis then takes place. His eyes brighten up and His face seems to become less emaciated because of a rosy nuance that spreads over His cheeks and above all because His smile lights it up. He stretches out His arms, which were folded, and exclaims: «My dear ones!». He says so raising His face, casting His eyes round, as if He wanted to communicate His joy to stalks and plants, to the clear sky, to the air, which already smells of springtime. He gathers His mantles round His body so that it may not get caught in the bushes and He runs down along a short cut to meet the apostles who are coming up, but have not yet seen Him. When He is within hearing range He calls them, to stop them going towards the village.

They hear the distant call, but perhaps from the spot where they are they cannot see Jesus, Whose dark mantle blends with the darkness of the wood that covers the slope. They look around gesticulating... Jesus calls them again... At last a clearing in the wood shows Him to them, in the sunshine, with His arms stretched out, as if He already wanted to embrace them. Then a loud cry re-echoes along the coast: «The Master!» and they start running up the crags, leaving the road, scratching themselves, stumbling, panting, without feeling the weight of their sacks or the difficulty in climbing... urged as they are by joy of seeing Him again.

The younger and more agile ones are naturally the first to reach Him, that is, Alphaeus' sons, as they proceed with the steady steps of people who live among hills, and John and Andrew, who run as fast as fawns, laughing happily. And they fall at His feet lovingly and reverently, beaming with happiness... Then James of Zebedee arrives and next the ones who are less experienced in races and mountains, Matthew and the Zealot who arrive almost together, and last... Peter.

But he elbows his way through the group in no uncertain manner to reach the Master, Whose legs have been embraced by the first arrivals, who are still kissing His mantle or His hands. He grasps John and Andrew who are clinging to Jesus' garments like oysters to a rock, and panting because of the exertion, he pushes them aside so that he can fall at Jesus' feet saying: «Oh! My Master! I am now back to life, at last! I could not bear it any longer. I have grown old and thin as if I had been seriously ill. Look whether it is true, Master...» and he raises his

head to be looked at by Jesus. But in doing so he sees the change in Jesus and he stands up shouting: «Master!? But what have You done? How foolish we are! Just look! Can't you see anything? Jesus has been ill!... Master of mine, what happened to you? Tell Your Simon!»

«Nothing, My friend.»

«Nothing? With that face? Then someone has hurt You?»

«No, Simon.»

«It's not possible. You have either been ill or persecuted! I have eyes to see!...»

«So have I. And I see that in fact you have grown old and thin. So, why are you so?» the Lord asks, smiling at Peter who is scanning Him as if he wanted to find out the truth from Jesus' hair, skin, beard...

«But I have suffered! And I do not deny it. Do You think it was pleasant to see so much grief?»

«You have said it! I suffered also for the same reason...»

«Just for that, Jesus?» asks Judas of Alphaeus with so much pity and love.

«Yes, because of that grief, My brother. Because of the grief caused by the necessity to send away...»

«And by the grief of being compelled by...»

«Please!... Be silent! Silence on My injury is dearer to Me than any word uttered to console Me, saying: "I know why You have suffered." In any case, you may all know, that I suffered for many reasons, not just for that one. And had Judas not interrupted Me, I would have told you.» Jesus is austere in saying so. They are all subdued.

But Peter is the first to collect himself and he asks: «But where have You been, Master? And what have You done?»

«I was in a grotto... praying... meditating... fortifying My spirit, obtaining strength for you in your mission, and for John and Syntyche in their suffering.»

«But where? Without clothes, without money! How did You manage?» Simon is excited.

«In a grotto I did not need anything.»

«But what about food, fire, a bed, everything... I mean! I was hoping that You would be a guest, like a lost pilgrim, at Jiphthahel, or elsewhere in a house, I mean. And that gave me some peace. But... eh?! Tell Him whether I was tormented by the thought that He was without clothes, without food, without the possibility of getting any, and above all, without the will of getting it. Ah! Jesus! You should not have done that! And You will never do it again! I will not leave You for one hour. I will sew my tunic to Yours, so that I can follow You like a shadow, whether You like it or not. I will part from You only if I die.»

«Or if I die.»

«Oh! not You. You must not die before me. Don't say that. Do You really want to break my heart?»

«No. On the contrary I want to rejoice with you and with everybody in this lovely hour that brings My dearest friends back to Me. See! I am already feeling better because your sincere love nourishes, warms and consoles Me in everything» and He caresses them one by one, while their faces shine with happy smiles, their eyes sparkle with joy and their lips tremble with emotion at those words, and they ask: «Really, Lord?», «Is that so, Master?», «Are we so dear to You?»

«Yes. So dear. Have you any food with you?»

«Yes. I was sure that You would be exhausted and I got some on the way. I have bread and roast meat, milk, cheese and apples; and a flask of generous wine and some eggs for You. Providing they are not broken...»

«Well, let us sit down here, in this lovely sunshine, and eat. While eating you can tell Me...»

They sit in the sun on a terrace and Peter opens his sack and examines his treasure: «Everything is all right» he exclaims. «Also the honey from Antigonea. Well! Didn't I tell you! On our way back, if they had put us in a barrel and had got a madman to roll it, or if they had put us in a boat without oars, even if the boat leaked, and there was a storm, we would have come back safe and sound... But going there... The more I think of it the more convinced I am that the demon was interfering with us. To prevent us from going with those two poor wretches...»

«Of course! On our way back there was no purpose...» confirms the Zealot.

«Master, did You do penance for us?» asks John, who is so intent in contemplating Jesus that he forgets to eat.

«Yes, John. My thought followed you. I perceived your dangers and your affliction. I helped you as I could...»

«Oh! I felt it! I even told you. Do you remember?»

«Yes. It is true» they all confirm.

«Well, you are now giving back to Me what I gave you.»

«Did You fast, Lord?» asks Andrew.

«Of course He did! Even if He wanted to eat, as He was without money, in a cave, how could you expect Him to get food?» replies Peter.

«All for our sake! How sorry I am!» says James of Alphaeus.

«Oh! no! Do not worry! I did not do it for you only, but for the whole world as well. As I did when I began My mission, so I did now. Then, at the end, I was assisted by angels. I am assisted by you now. And believe Me, it is a double joy to Me. Because the ministry of charity is unbreakable by angels. But it is not so easily found among men. You are practising it. And from men, for My sake, you have become angels having chosen to be holy at all costs. You therefore make Me happy, both as God and as Man-God. Because you give Me what comes from God: Charity, and you give Me what pertains to the Redeemer: your elevation to Perfection. That is what comes from you and it is more nourishing than any food. Also then, in the desert, I was nourished with love after fasting. And it restored Me. And what happened then, is happening now! We have all suffered. Both you and I. But not in vain. I think, I know that it has helped you more than a full year of teaching. Sorrow, meditation on the harm man can do to his neighbour, the piety, faith, hope, charity you had to practise, all by yourselves, have matured you like children who become men...»

«Oh! yes! I have grown old, I have indeed. I will never again be the same Simon of Jonah as I was when I left. I have understood how sorrowful, how toilsome is our mission, notwithstanding all its beauty...» says Peter with a sigh.

«Well, we are all together now. Tell Me...»

«Speak, Simon. You can speak better than I can» says Peter to the Zealot. «No. As a good leader you must speak on behalf of everybody» replies the other.

And Peter begins, stating as a preliminary introduction: «But help me.» He recounts everything in good order until the departure from Antioch. He then begins to speak of their return: «We were all grieved, as You can readily understand. I will never forget the last words of those two...» With the back of his hand Peter wipes two big tears streaming down his cheeks... «They sounded like the last cry of someone drowning... Listen... you had better go on... I cannot...» and he gets up and goes away to control his emotion.

Simon Zealot resumes: «None of us spoke for a long while... We could not... We had a lump in our throats, which were aching... And we did not want to weep... because if one of us had begun, it would have been the end... I had taken the reins, because Simon of Jonah, to conceal his sorrowful state, had gone to the end of the cart pretending to search for something in the sacks. We stopped at a little village half way between Antioch and Seleucia. Although moonlight became brighter and brighter as night became darker, we stopped there, because we were not familiar with the roads. And we dozed there, lying on our belongings. None of us would eat... because we could not. We were thinking of those two... At daybreak we crossed the bridge and before the third hour we were at Seleucia. We took the horse and cart back to the hotel-keeper and since he was such a kind man, we asked his advice with regard to the ship. He said: “I will come to the port with you. I know people and they know me.” And that is what he did. He found three boats leaving for ports in this area. But on one there were some... queer fellows, with whom we did not want to be. Our man told us, as he had heard of them from the owner of the boat. The second one was from Ashkelon and they refused to call at Tyre, unless we paid a sum of money that we could not afford. The third one was a really miserable little boat, with a load of timber. A poor boat, with few hands and I think with a great deal of misery. That is why they agreed to call at Tyre, although they were heading for Caesarea, providing we paid for one day's meals and wages for the whole crew. It suited us. Actually both Matthew and I were somewhat worried. There are storms at this time of the year... and You know what happened on our way there. But Simon Peter said: “Nothing will happen.” So we went on board. The boat sailed so smoothly and fast that angels seemed to be acting as sails. We reached Tyre in only half of the time which had taken us to get there and when we arrived the owner of the boat was so kind that he agreed to tow our boat until we were near Ptolemais. Peter, Andrew and John had gone into it to handle it... But it was very easy... Nothing like our outward voyage. At Ptolemais we parted. And we were so pleased that before getting into our boat where all our things

were, we gave him more money than we had agreed upon. We stopped one day at Ptolemais, and then we came here... But we will never forget what we suffered. Simon of Jonah is right.»

«And are we not right also in saying that the demon interfered with us only on our outward voyage?» some of the apostles ask.

«You are right. Now listen. Your mission is over. We shall now go towards Jiphthahel, waiting for Philip and Nathanael. And we must do that at once. Then the others will come... In the meantime we shall evangelize here, at the borders of Phoenicia and in Phoenicia itself. But what has recently happened is to be buried in your hearts forever. You shall not reply to anybody enquiring about it.»

«Not even to Philip and Nathanael? They know that we came with You...»

«I will speak to them. I have suffered very much, My dear friends, as you have seen yourselves. With My suffering I paid for John's and Syntyche's peace. Do not let My suffering be useless. Do not overburden My shoulders with another weight. I have already so many!... And their weight becomes heavier day by day, hour by hour... Tell Nathanael that I have suffered very much. Tell Philip, and tell them to be good. Tell the other two. If you tell them that you have understood that I have suffered, and that I confirmed it, you are telling them the truth. Nothing else is needed.»

Jesus is speaking wearily... The eight look at Him sorrowfully, and Peter dares to caress His head, standing behind His back. Jesus raises His head and looks at His honest Peter with a sad loving smile.

«Oh! I cannot bear to see You like that! It seems... I feel that the joy of our reunion is over and that only its holiness is left! Well... Let us go to Achzib. You will change Your clothes, shave Your cheeks and tidy Your hair. You cannot stay like that! I cannot bear to see You like that... You look like one... who has escaped from cruel hands, like one who has been beaten, or is exhausted... You look like Abel of Bethlehem in Galilee, freed from his enemies...»

«Yes, Peter. But it is the heart of your Master that has been ill-treated... and it will never recover again... On the contrary it will be hurt more and more. Let us go...»

John sighs: «I am sorry... I would have liked to inform Thomas, who is so fond of Your Mother, of the miracle of the song and of the ointment...»

«You will tell him one day... Not now. One day you will tell everything. You will then be allowed to speak. I Myself will say to you: "Go and tell everything you know." In the meantime see the truth in the miracle. That is: the power of Faith. John and Syntyche calmed the sea and cured the man not by means of words or of the ointment. But through the faith with which they mentioned the Name of Mary and made use of Her ointment. And also because your faith was there as well, and your charity. Charity towards the injured man. Charity towards the Cretan. You saved the life of the former and tried to give faith to the latter. But if it is easy to cure bodies, it is very difficult to cure souls... There is no disease more difficult to wipe out, than a spiritual one...» and Jesus gives a deep sigh.

They are within sight of Achzib. Peter goes ahead with Matthew looking for lodgings. The others follow gathered round Jesus. The sun sets fast, while they enter the village...

325. At Achzib with Six Apostles.

11th November 1945.

«Lord, during the night I have been thinking... Why do You want to come so far, and then come back to the Phoenician border? Let me go with one of my companions. I will sell Antonius... I regret having to do it... but we do not need it any more and it would attract people's notice. And I will go and meet Philip and Bartholomew. They can only come along that road and I shall certainly meet them. And You may rest assured that I will not speak. I do not wish to grieve You... You can rest here with the others and it will save us all going all the way to Jiphthahel... and we will save time» says Peter while coming out of the house where they slept. And they look less haggard, as they are wearing clean clothes and their beards and hair have been dressed by skillful hands.

«It is a good idea. I will not stop you. You may go with whichever companion you wish.»

«With Simon, then. Bless us, o Lord.»

Jesus embraces them saying: «With a kiss. Go.»

They watch them descend quickly towards the plain.

«How good Simon of Jonah is! During the past days I have appreciated him as I had never done before» says Judas Thaddeus.

«So did I» says Matthew. «He is never selfish, proud or exacting!»

«He has never taken advantage of the fact that he was our head. On the contrary, he seemed to be the last one, still maintaining his position» adds James of Alphaeus.

«We are not surprised. We have known him for years. He is hot tempered but very kind-hearted. And so honest!» says James of Zebedee.

«My brother is good, even if he is coarse. But since he has been with Jesus, he has become twice as good. My nature is entirely different and sometimes it made him angry, because he knew that I was suffering because of my character. He got angry because he was fond of me. When one understands him, one gets along with him very well» says Andrew.

«During the past days we have always understood one another and we have always been of one mind» states John.

«That's true! I noticed that myself. During the whole month, also in moments of excitement, we have never been at variance among ourselves... Whereas sometimes... I don't know why...» monologises James of Zebedee.

«Why? But it is easily understood! Because we are righteous in our intentions. We are not perfect; but we are righteous. We therefore accept the good which one proposes and we reject the evil which is pointed out to us as such, whereas previously we had not realised that by ourselves. Why? It is easily said! Because the eight of us are of the same mind: to do things in such a way as to please Jesus. That's all!» exclaims Thaddeus.

«I do not think that the others are of a different mind» says Andrew in a conciliatory tone.

«No. Neither Philip nor Bartholomew, although the latter is rather elderly and very much an Israelite... Neither is Thomas, although he is inclined to be much more human than spiritual. I would do them wrong, should I accuse them of... Jesus, You are right. Forgive me. But if You knew what it means to me to see You suffer! And because of him! I am Your disciple, like all the rest. But over and above I am Your brother and friend and I have Alphaeus' fiery blood in my

veins. Jesus, don't look at me so severely or so sadly. You are the Lamb and I... the lion. And believe me, I find it hard to refrain from tearing with a blow of my paw the network of slander that is enveloping You and from knocking down the shelter in which the true enemy is hiding. I would like to see the real side of his spiritual face, which I call... and perhaps it is calumny; and if I could identify him without the least fear of error, I would mark him in such a way that for the rest of his life he would not dream of hurting You» says Thaddeus passionately, although Jesus had cast a glance at him to stop him, when he began to speak.

James of Zebedee replies to him: «You would have to mark half of the people in Israel!... But Jesus will proceed just the same. During the past days you have seen whether anything can stop Jesus. What shall we do now, Master? Have You spoken here?»

«No. I have not been on these slopes one day yet. I slept in the wood.»

«Why did they not want You?»

«Their hearts rejected the Pilgrim... I was penniless...»

«They are hard-hearted then! What were they afraid of?»

«That I might be a highwayman... But it does not matter. The Father Who is in Heaven made Me meet with a goat, which was either lost or had run away. Come, I will show her to you. She lives in the thicket with her kid. But she did not run away when she saw Me arrive. On the contrary, she let Me milk her... into My mouth, as if I were her little one, too. And I slept near her, with the little kid almost on My heart. God is good to His Word!»

They go towards the place where they met yesterday, a thorny thicket. In the middle there is an age-old oak tree, surviving I know not how, split as it is, as if the ground had opened breaking apart its robust trunk, all covered with green ivy and bramble bare of leaves at present. The goat is grazing nearby with her little kid and seeing so many men she levels her horns ready to defend herself. But she soon recognises Jesus and calms down. They throw some bread crusts to her and withdraw.

«I slept over there» explains Jesus. «And I would have stayed here, if you had not come. I was hungry. The purpose in fasting was over... And it was not necessary to insist on other things that can no longer be changed...»

Jesus is sad once again... The six cast sidelong glances at one another, but do not

say anything. «And now? Where are we going?»

«We shall stay here today. Tomorrow we will go down and preach on the road to Ptolemais and then we will go towards the Phoenician border and come back here before the Sabbath.»

And they slowly return to the village.

326. Evangelizing at the Border of Phoenicia.

[No date].

The road coming from Phoenicia towards Ptolemais is a beautiful road which cuts straight across the plain between the sea and the mountains. Because it is well kept, it is very busy. There are various junctions with secondary roads running from inland towns to towns on the coast, and at the numerous crossroads there is generally a house, a well and a rudimentary forge for quadrupeds that may need shoes.

Jesus, with the six apostles left with Him, covers a good stretch of the road, about two kilometres, seeing the same things all the time. He stops at last near one of those houses with a well and a farriery, at a crossroad near a torrent crossed by a bridge, which although strongly built, is just wide enough to let one cart pass at a time and thus travellers are compelled to stop alternately, because the two opposite currents of traffic cannot pass at the same time. And as far as I can see, that gives the travellers of different races, Phoenicians and true Israelites, the opportunity to join in one only intent: that of cursing Rome, although they hate one another... And yet, without Rome, they would not have that bridge and when the torrent is in flood, I do not know how they would be able to cross it. But such is life! An oppressor is always hated, even if he does useful things!

Jesus stops near the bridge, in the sunny corner where the house is; on its side along the torrent there is an ill-smelling smithy shop, where they are forging shoes for a horse and two donkeys, which have lost theirs. The horse is harnessed to a Roman wagon in which some soldiers take delight in making faces at the cursing Jews. And they throw a handful of horse manure on an old

big-nosed man, the most rancorous of all of them, with a real viperous mouth, someone who I think would willingly bite the Romans to poison them. One can imagine what happens! The old Jew runs away as if he had been infected with leprosy and other Jews join him. The Phoenicians shout ironically: «Do you like the new manna? Eat it, it will give you energy to shout against those who are too good to you, you hypocritical vipers!» The soldiers laugh scornfully... Jesus is silent.

The Roman wagon at last departs and they greet the farrier shouting: «Hail, Titus, may your stay be prosperous!» The man, who is vigorous, elderly, bull-necked, clean shaven with very dark eyes above a sturdy nose and under a wide protruding forehead, which is bald at the temples, while his hair is short and frizzly, raises a heavy hammer waving them goodbye and then goes back to the anvil, on which a young man had laid a red-hot iron, while another boy sears the hoof of a little donkey preparing it to be shod.

«Almost all the farriers along the roads are Romans. Soldiers who remained here when they finished their service. And they earn a lot of money... Nothing ever prevents them from curing animals... And a donkey may lose a shoe before sunset on a Sabbath, or at the time of the Dedication...» remarks Matthew.

«The man who shod Antonius was married to a Jewess» says John. «And foolish women are more numerous than wise ones» states James of Zebedee. «And to whom do the children belong? To God or to paganism?» asks Andrew.

«They generally belong to the stronger of the two» replies Matthew. «And, unless the woman is an apostate herself, they are Hebrews, because men, at least these men, do not interfere. They are not even very... fanatical about their Olympus. I think that now they believe in nothing but the necessity of money. They have all large families.»

«But they are mean people. They have no faith, no fatherland... they are disliked by everybody...» says Thaddeus.

«No. You are wrong. Rome does not despise them. On the contrary, Rome always helps them. They are more useful now than when they were armed. They penetrate into our country more by corruption of blood than by violence. It is the first generation, eventually, that suffers. Then they spread and... the world forgets...» says Matthew who seems to be well informed.

«Yes, it is the children that suffer. But also the Jewish women, married like

that... For themselves and for their children. I feel sorry for them. Nobody speaks to them of God any longer. But that will not happen in future. *Then there will be no such separations of people and countries, because souls will be united in one Fatherland only: Mine»* says Jesus, Who has been silent so far.

«But they will be dead by then!...» exclaims John.

«No. *They will be gathered in My Name.* No longer Romans or Libyans, Greeks or people from the Black Sea area, Iberians or Gauls, Egyptians or Hebrews, but souls of Christ. And woe betide those who will distinguish souls, whom I equally loved and for whom I equally suffered, according to their nationalities. He who should do that would prove that he has not understood Charity, which is universal.»

The apostles understand the covert reproof and lower their heads without speaking...

The clangor of iron beaten on the anvil has ceased and the hammer blows on the last hoof of a donkey are deadening. And Jesus takes advantage of the situation to speak loud so that the crowds may hear Him. He seems to be continuing His conversation with the apostles, in actual fact He is speaking to the passers-by and perhaps also to those in the houses, certainly to some women, as women's voices calling one another can be heard in the mild air.

«There is always a relationship among men, even if it does not appear to exist: that is, the origin from One only Creator. If later the children of the Only Father have become separated, the tie of their origin has not changed, as the blood of a son who disowns his father's house does not change. In Cain's veins there was Adam's blood also after the crime which compelled him to roam in the wide world. And in the veins of the children born after Eve's grief, weeping over her murdered son, there was the same blood that boiled in the veins of far away Cain. The same, and for a purer reason, applies to the equality of the children of the Creator. Are they lost, exiled, apostates, guilty, speaking languages different from ours, do they believe in faiths which we loathe, are they corrupted by marrying heathens? Yes? But their souls came from One God, and they are always the same, even if they are torn, lost, exiled, corrupt... Even if they are the cause of grief to the God Father, they are still souls created by Him. The good children of a very good Father must have good feelings. Good towards the Father, good towards brothers, whatever they may have become, because they are children of the same Father. Good towards the Father by endeavouring to

console Him for His grief, taking His children back to Him, as they are the cause of His grief, either because they are sinners or because they are apostates or pagans. Good towards them because they have souls created by the Father, enclosed in guilty, sullied bodies and have become dull through wrong religions, but are always souls of God equal to our own.

Remember, you people of Israel, that *there is no one, not even the idolater most remote from God because of his idolatrous religion, not even the most pagan of pagans or the most atheistic man, who is completely devoid of some trace of his origin.* Remember, you who have gone wrong, in getting detached from our just Religion by descending to mixing sexes, which is condemned by our Religion, that even if you think that everything that was Israel is now dead in you, suffocated by the love for a man of different faith and race, it is not dead. There is something still alive, and that is Israel. And it is your duty to blow the dying fire, to foster the spark still existing by the will of God, so that it may overwhelm carnal love. That love ends with death, but your souls do not. Remember that. And you, whoever you may be, who see, and at times are horrified at seeing the hybrid marriage of a daughter of Israel with a man of different race and faith, remember that it is your duty and obligation to assist the mislaid sister charitably, so that she may find her way back to the Father. This is the new holy Law, agreeable to the Lord: that the followers of the Redeemer may redeem whoever is to be redeemed, so that God may smile because of the souls that go back to the Father's House and the sacrifice of the Redeemer may not be made unfruitful and mean.

To leaven dough the housewife takes a little of the dough of the previous week. Oh! only a tiny bit of the whole mass! And she buries it in the dough, and protects it from harmful draughts in the favourable warmth of the house. Do likewise yourselves, you followers of Good, and you, too, who have gone away from the Father and from His Kingdom. Let the former give a tiny part of their yeast to support and reinforce the latter, who will add it to the particle of justice still existing in them. And both of you, protect the new yeast from the hostile draughts of Evil in the warmth of Charity, according to what it is in you: your mistress, or a persistent, although now languishing survivor. Support with the warmth of your homes, with the faith of the same religion what is fermenting in the heart of a mislaid co-religionist, so that she may feel that she is still loved, she is still a daughter of Zion and a sister of yours, and her good will may materialise and the Kingdom of Heaven may come to all souls.»

«But who is He?» people ask, and they no longer seem in a hurry to cross the bridge although it is now clear, or to go on their way, if they have already crossed it.

«A rabbi.»

«A rabbi of Israel.»

«Here? At the Phoenician borders? It is the first time that that happens!»

«And yet it is so. Aser told me that He is the Holy One, as people call Him.»

«Perhaps He is seeking refuge here because they persecute Him on the other side.»

«They are reptiles indeed!»

«It is a good thing if He stays with us! He will work miracles...»

In the meantime Jesus has gone away along a path in the fields..

327. Arrival at Alexandrosene.

12th November 1945.

They reach the road once again after a long tour through fields and after crossing the torrent by a little bridge of squeaky boards, fit only for people: a footbridge rather than anything more substantial. And they continue walking along the plain, which becomes narrower and narrower as the hills come closer to the coast, so much so that after another torrent, with the usual essential Roman bridge, the road leaves the plain and becomes mountainous and forks at the bridge: one road, which is not so steep, runs northwards along a valley, the other one, which Jesus takes following the indication of the Roman mile stone: «Alexandrosene – V m.», is a real flight of steps in the steep rocky mountain, the sharp ends of which drop into the Mediterranean, while the view of the sea becomes wider and wider as they climb. Only pedestrians and little donkeys can go along that road, or flight of steps, as it should be called. But probably because it is a good short cut, it is very busy and people curiously watch the unusual Galilean group going along it.

«That must be the cape of the storm» says Matthew pointing to the promontory jutting out into the sea.

«Yes, down there is the village of which the fisherman spoke to us» confirms James of Zebedee.

«I wonder who built this road?»

«Who knows how long it has been here! Phoenician work perhaps...»

«From the top we shall see Alexandrosene beyond which there is the White Cape. You will see a large expanse of sea, My dear John» says Jesus laying an arm on the shoulders of the apostle.

«That will make me happy. But it will soon be dark. Where are we stopping?»

«At Alexandrosene. See? The road is already going down. Down there the plain stretches as far as that town which you can see over there.»

«It is the town of the woman from Antigonea... How can we satisfy her request?» asks Andrew.

«You know, Master, she said to us: “Go to Alexandrosene. My brothers have stores there and they are proselytes. Tell them about the Master. We are children of God, too... “ and she wept because, as she is a daughter-in-law, she is rather frowned upon... so her brothers never go to see her and she never hears of them...» explains John.

«We will look for her brothers. If they welcome us as pilgrims, we shall be able to satisfy her...»

«But how can we prove that we have seen her?»

«She works for Lazarus. And we are Lazarus' friends» says Jesus.

«That is true. You can speak...»

«Yes. But quicken your pace so that we may find the house. Do you know where it is?»

«Yes, it is near the Fort. They deal very much with the Romans to whom they sell many goods.»

«Very well.»

They cover the beautiful level road quickly, a real consular road, linked with

roads coming from the mainland and it proceeds towards the mainland after the steep flight of steps across the rocky promontory near the coast.

Alexandrosce is more a military than a civil town. It must be of strategic importance, but I do not know why. Enclosed between two promontories it looks like a sentry watching that part of the sea. Now that it is possible to see both capes, many military towers are visible on them, forming a chain with those in the plain and in town, where the imposing Fort dominates near the sea-shore.

They enter the town after crossing another little torrent near the gate and they proceed towards the severe mass of the Fort looking around inquisitively and being watched curiously. There are numerous soldiers and they appear to be on good terms with the citizens, which makes the apostles mumble: «These Phoenicians have no sense of honour!»

They reach the stores of Hermione's brothers, while the last customers are coming out laden with all kinds of goods, from pieces of cloth to kitchenware, to hay, corn, oil, foodstuffs. The large entrance hall smells of leather, spices, hay, straw, raw wool and it leads into a yard as wide as a square, with storehouses under the porches.

A swarthy bearded man goes to meet them: «What do you need? Foodstuffs?»

«Yes... and lodgings, if you do not mind giving hospitality to pilgrims. We come from far and have never been here before. Welcome us in the name of the Lord.»

The man looks carefully at Jesus Who has spoken on behalf of everybody. He scans His face, then says: «Actually we do not give lodgings. But I like You. You are a Galilean, are You not? Better Galileans than Judaeans. Too much mould in the latter. They never forgive us for not having pure blood. It would be much better if their souls were pure. Come, come in here, I will be back at once. I am closing up, it is already dark.» It is in fact twilight and it is even darker in the yard overlooked by the powerful Fort.

They go into a room and, tired as they are, they sit down on seats scattered here and there...

The man comes back with two more brothers, an older and a younger one, and shows them the guests, who stand up greeting, saying: «Here they are. What do you think? They seem to be honest...»

«Yes. You have done the right thing» says the oldest brother to his younger one, and then addressing the guest, or rather, Jesus, Who clearly appears to be the head, he asks: «What are your names?»

«Jesus of Nazareth, James and Judas also of Nazareth, James and John of Bethsaida and Andrew as well, and Matthew of Capernaum.»

«How come you are here? Persecuted?»

«No. We are evangelizing. We have been all over Palestine more than once, from Galilee to Judaea, from one sea to the other. And we have been beyond the Jordan, as far as Hauran. We have now come here to teach.»

«A rabbi here? It's amazing, isn't it, Philip and Elias?» asks the oldest brother.

«Yes, very. To which caste do you belong?»

«To none. I belong to God. The good people of the world believe in Me. I am poor and I love the poor, but I do not despise rich people, whom I teach to love, to be merciful and to be detached from riches, as I teach the poor to love their poverty trusting in God Who does not let anybody perish. Among My rich friends and disciples there is Lazarus of Bethany...»

«Lazarus? A sister of ours is married to one of his servants.»

«I know. That is also one of the reasons why I came. To tell you that she sends you her regards and loves you.»

«Have You seen her?»

«I have not. But these who are with Me, were sent to Antigonea by Lazarus.»

«Oh! Tell us! How is Hermione? Is she really happy?»

«Her husband and mother-in-law are very fond of her. Her father-in-law respects her...» says Judas Thaddeus.

«But he does not forgive her her mother's blood. Say so.»

«He is about to forgive her. He praised her very highly. And she has four lovely kind children, who make her happy. You are always in her heart and she asked us to bring you the Divine Master.»

«But... what?... Are You the one who is said to be the Messiah?»

«I am.»

«You really are the... We were told in Jerusalem that You are, that they call You the Word of God? Is that true?»

«Yes, it is.»

«But are You the Word for those over there, or for everybody?»

«For everybody. Can you believe that I am the Word of God?»

«It costs nothing to believe, particularly when one hopes that what one believes in can remove what makes us suffer.»

«That is true, Elias. But do not say that. It is an impure thought, much more impure than mixed blood. Do not rejoice at the hope that what makes you suffer as a man despised by other people may vanish, but rejoice at the hope of conquering the Kingdom of Heaven.»

«You are right. I am half a pagan, Lord...»

«Do not lose heart. I love you also and I have come for you, too.»

«They must be tired, Elias. You are keeping them here talking. Let us go and have supper and then we will take them to rest. There are no women here... None of the women from Israel wanted us, whereas we wanted one of them... Forgive us, therefore if the house will seem cold and bare.»

«Your kind hearts will warm and adorn it for us.»

«How long are You staying?»

«Not more than one day. I want to go towards Tyre and Sidon and I would like to be at Achzib before the Sabbath.»

«It's not possible, Lord. Sidon is far away!»

«I would like to speak here tomorrow.»

«Our house is like a port. Without going out You will have as many listeners as You wish, all the more so as tomorrow is market day.»

«Let us go, then, and may the Lord reward you for your charity.»

328. The Day after at Alexandrosce. Parable of the Vineyard Labourers.

13th November 1945.

One half of the yard of the three brothers is in the shade, the other is in bright sunshine. And it is full of people coming and going, doing their shopping, while outside the main door, in the little square, people are bustling about the noisy market of Alexandrosce, buying donkeys, sheep, lambs, poultry; because it is obvious that people are not so fussy here and thus they take poultry to the market without any fear of contamination. Braying, bleating, cackling of hens and triumphant cock-a-doodle-does of cockerels mingle with the voices of people in a merry chorus, the notes of which now and again become dramatically high because of some quarrel.

Also the yard of the brothers is very busy and people often wrangle over prices or because a customer has taken what somebody else intended to purchase. Then there is the querulous moaning of beggars in the square, near the main door, wailing over their misfortunes in a singsong as sad as the lamentation of a dying man.

Roman soldiers move imperiously about the square and warehouses. I suppose that they are on duty as I see that they are armed and never alone among the Phoenicians who are all armed.

Jesus also walks up and down the yard with the six apostles, waiting for the right moment to speak. He then goes out into the square, and passing near the beggars He gives them alms. People pause for a moment to look at the Galilean group and ask who the foreigners are. And there are some who tell them, as they have already enquired of the three brothers about their guests.

A murmur follows Jesus' steps as He walks about peacefully caressing the children He meets on His way. There is also someone who sneers and utters unpleasant epithets at the Hebrews, as well as people who honestly wish to hear this «Prophet», this «Rabbi», this «Holy Man», this «Messiah» of Israel, as those are the names by which they refer to Him, according to their faith and their sense of righteousness.

I hear two mothers say: «But is it true?»

«Daniel told me himself. When in Jerusalem he spoke to people who had seen the miracles of the Holy Man.»

«Yes, I agree! But is this the same man?»

«Oh! Daniel told me that it cannot be but Him, because of what He says.»

«Well... what do you think? Will He grant me the grace, even if I am only a proselyte?»

«I would say so... Try. Perhaps He will not come back here again. Try! He will certainly not hurt you!»

«I am going» says the little woman leaving the vendor of kitchenware with whom she was haggling over some soup-plates. The man, who had heard the conversation of the two women, disappointed and irritated because a good deal had come to nothing, rails at the remaining woman: «Cursed proselyte. Jewish blood. Corrupted woman» etc. etc.

I hear two grave bearded men say: «I would like to hear Him. They say that He is a great Rabbi.»

«A Prophet, you should say. Greater than the Baptist. Elias told me certain things! Wonderful things! And he knows because his sister is married to a servant of a very wealthy man of Israel, and to get news of her he calls on his fellow-servants. That rich man is a great friend of the Rabbi...»

A third man, a Phoenician perhaps, who being close to the two has heard what they said, thrusts forth his thin satyric face between the two and says laughing scornfully: «Lovely holiness! Dressed with wealth! As far as I know a holy man should live in poverty!»

«Hold your cursed tongue, Doro. You, heathen, are not fit to judge these things.»

«Ah! You are fit, particularly you, Samuel. You had better pay me that debt of yours.»

«Here, take it, and don't come near me any more, you faun-faced vampire!»...

I hear an old half-blind man, led by a little girl, ask: «Where is the Messiah?» and the girl says: «Make room for old Mark! Please tell old Mark where the Messiah is!»

The feeble trembling voice of the old man and the girl's argentine and steady one spread in vain over the square, until another man says: «Do you want to go to the Rabbi? He has gone back towards Daniel's house. There He is, standing

over there, speaking to the beggars.»

I can hear two Roman soldiers say: «He must be the one whom those crooks of the Jews persecute! Only by looking at Him you can see that He is better than they are.»

«That is why He annoys them.»

«Let's go and tell the ensign. That is the instruction.»

«How silly, o Caius! Rome beware of lambs and puts up with, nay I would say: caresses tigers.»

«I don't think so, Scipio! Pontius puts people to death quite easily!»

«Yes, but he does not close his house to the creeping hyenas who flatter him.»

«Politics, Scipio! Politics!»

«Cowardice, Caius, and stupidity. He should make friends with this Man. He would receive help to keep this Asiatic rabble obedient. Pontius serves Rome badly by neglecting this good man and flattering wicked people.»

«Do not criticise our Proconsul. We are soldiers and our superior is as sacred as a god. We have sworn obedience to divine Caesar and the Proconsul is his representative.»

«That is all right with regard to our duty towards our sacred and immortal fatherland. But not with regard to one's personal judgment.»

«But obedience is based on judgment. If your judgment is against an order and criticises it, you will not obey wholeheartedly. Rome relies on our blind obedience to defend its conquests.»

«You speak like a tribune and you are quite right. But I would point out to you that if Rome is queen, we are not slaves. We are subjects. Rome has no slave citizens, and must not have any. It is slavery to prevent citizens from speaking their minds. I say that it is my opinion that Pontius is wrong in not taking care of this Israelite, call Him Messiah, Holy, Prophet., Rabbi, as you like. And I feel that I can say so because my loyalty to Rome is in no way impaired. Neither is my love. Nay, that is what I would like, because I feel that by teaching people to respect the laws and the Consuls, He cooperates to the welfare of Rome.»

«You are a learned man, Scipio... You will go a long way. You are already well

ahead! I am a poor soldier. But look over there. There is an assemblage of people round the Man. Let us go and tell our superiors...»

In fact near the main door of the three brothers there is a group of people round Jesus, Who is well visible because of His height. Then all of a sudden a shout is heard and the people become excited. Many people rush from the market towards the group while others leave the group and run towards the square and beyond it. Questions... answers...

«What happened?»

«What is the matter?»

«The Man from Israel has cured old Mark!»

«The veil has vanished from his eyes.»

Jesus in the meantime has gone into the yard followed by a train of people. Behind them all, moving with great difficulty there is one of the beggars, a cripple, who is dragging himself along more with his hands than with his feet. But if his legs are crippled and weak, so that without crutches he would not be able to move, his voice is quite strong! He sounds like a siren rending the sunny morning air: «Holy! Holy! Messiah! Rabbi! Have mercy on me!» He is shouting at the top of his voice unrelentingly.

Two or three people turn round: «Spare your breath! Mark is a Jew, you are not.»

«He grants graces to true Israelites, not to the sons of a dog!»

«My mother was Hebrew...»

«And God struck her because of her sin, giving her a monster like you. Away, you son of a she-wolf! Go back to your place, you filthy mud...»

The man leans against the wall, he is down-hearted and frightened by threatening fists... Jesus stops, turns round, looks at him. He orders: «Man, come here!» The man looks at Him, looks at those threatening him... and dare not come forward.

Jesus squeezes through the little crowd and goes to him. He takes him by the hand, that is, He lays His hand on the man's shoulder and says: «Be not afraid. Come with Me» and looking at the merciless people He says severely: «God belongs to all men who seek Him and are merciful.»

They take a hint and are now the ones to be left at the rear of the crowd, or rather, they remain where they are.

Jesus turns round again. He sees that they are embarrassed and on the point of going away, and He says to them: «No, you may come forward as well. It will do you good, too, it will straighten and fortify your souls as I am going to straighten and fortify this man, because he has faith. Man, I tell you, be cured of your infirmity.» And He takes His hand off the shoulder of the cripple, after the latter has something like a shock.

The man straightens himself up on his legs now steady, throws away his worn out crutches and shouts: «He has cured me! Praised be the God of my mother!» and he kneels down to kiss the hem of Jesus' mantle.

The tumult of those who wish to see, or have seen and are making comments, rises to the highest pitch. In the long entrance hall, leading from the square to the yard, the clamour resounds with the resonance of a well and is echoed by the walls of the Fort.

The soldiers think that there is a brawl – which is likely to be the case in places like this one with so many contrasting races and religions – and a squad rushes to the spot; they elbow their way violently through the crowd asking what is the matter.

«A miracle, a miracle! Jonah, the cripple, has been cured. There he is, over there, near the Galilean.»

The soldiers look at one another. They do not speak until the whole crowd has passed by and more people have piled up behind it coming from the warehouses and the square, where only the vendors are left; they are fretting with indignation at the sudden distraction, which has caused the market to be a complete failure that day. Then, when they see one of the three brothers pass by, they ask him: «Philip, do you know what the Rabbi is going to do now?»

«He will be speaking and teaching in my yard!» replies Philip all overjoyed. The soldiers consult with one another: «Shall we stay? Shall we go away?»

«The ensign told us to watch...»

«Whom? The Man? As far as He is concerned we may as well go and amuse ourselves dicing for an amphora of wine of Cyprus» says Scipio, the soldier who had previously defended Jesus talking to his companion.

«I would say that He needs protection, not the rights of Rome! See Him over there? Amongst all our gods there is not one so mild and yet so manly looking. The mob here are unworthy of Him. And the unworthy are always wicked. Let us stay and protect Him. If necessary we will defend Him and will dust these galley-slaves' jackets» says another one half sarcastically and half admiringly.

«You are right, Pudens. Nay, Actius, go and call Procorus, the ensign who is always dreaming of plots against Rome... and of promotions for himself, as a reward for his keen watching over the health of divine Caesar and of goddess Rome, the mother and mistress of the world, so that he may convince himself that he will not gain any arm-band or crown here.»

A young soldier runs away and comes back at once saying: «Procorus is not coming. He is sending triarius Aquila...»

«Very well! Better him than Cecilius Maximus himself. Aquila has served in Africa, in Gaul, and in the wild forests where Varus and his legions were wiped out. He knows Greeks and Britons and he is clever at telling... Oh! Hail! Here is our glorious Aquila! Come, teach us poor wretches how to judge the value of men!»

«Long live Aquila, the master of armies!» they all shout shaking the old soldier whose face, bare arms and calves are marked with scars.

He smiles in a friendly manner and exclaims: «Long live Rome, the mistress of the world! Not me, a poor soldier. What is the matter?»

«We are to watch that tall man, whose hair is as fair as very light copper.»

«Good. But who is He?»

«They say He is the Messiah. His name is Jesus and He comes from Nazareth. You know, He is the one about whom the order was issued...»

«H'm! May be... But I think that we are chasing shadows.»

«They say that He wants to proclaim Himself King and supplant Rome. The Sanhedrin, Sadducees, Pharisees and Herodians have denounced Him to Pontius. You know that the Jews have that fixed idea in their heads, and a king pops up now and again...»

«I know, I know... But if they are worried about this one... In any case let us listen to what He says. I think that He is going to speak.»

«I heard from the centurion's soldier that Publius Quintillianus said to him that He is a divine philosopher... The imperial ladies are enthusiastic for Him...» says another young soldier.

«I am sure they are! I would be enthusiastic myself if I were a woman and I would like to have him in my bed...» says another young soldier laughing wholeheartedly.

«Shut up, you wanton fellow! Lust is devouring you!» remarks another one jokingly. «And not you, Fabius! Anna, Syra, Alba, Mary...»

«Be quiet, Sabinus, He is speaking and I want to listen to Him» orders the triarius. They all become silent.

Jesus has got on a case placed against a wall. He can thus be seen by everybody. His kind greeting has spread through the air and is followed by the words: «Children of one only Creator, listen», and in the heedful silence of the crowd, He continues.

«The Time of Grace has come not only for Israel, but for everybody in the world. Men of Israel, who are here for various reasons, proselytes, Phoenicians, Gentiles, everybody, listen to the Word of God, understand Justice and become familiar with Charity. If you have Wisdom, Justice and Charity, you have the means of attaining the Kingdom of God, which is not exclusive to the children of Israel, but belongs to all those who from now on will love the One True God and will believe in the word of His Word.

Listen. I have come from very far, but not with the ambition of a usurper or with the violence of a conqueror. I have come to be only the Saviour of your souls. Property, wealth, offices, do not seduce Me. They mean nothing to Me and I do not even look at them. Or rather I look at them to pity them, for I feel sorry for them, because they are chains that hold your souls prisoners, preventing them from coming to the One, Eternal, Universal, Holy, Blessed Lord. I look at them and I approach them as if they were the greatest miseries. And I endeavour to rid them of their fascinating but cruel deceit that seduces the sons of man, so that they may use them with justice and holiness, not as cruel weapons that wound and kill men, and first of all the souls of those who do not make a holy use of them.

But I solemnly tell you that it is much easier for Me to cure a deformed body than a perverted soul; it is easier for Me to give light back to blind eyes or health

to a dying body, than light to souls and health to diseased spirits. Why? Because man has lost sight of the true purpose of his life and devotes himself to what is transient. Man does not know or does not remember, or although he remembers, he does not want to obey the holy order of the Lord – and I say this also to the Gentiles who are listening to Me – to do Good, which is Good in Rome as in Athens, in Gaul as in Africa, because the moral law exists under every sky, in every religion and in every righteous heart. And religions, from that of God to that of individual morals, say that our better part survives and its destiny in the next life will be according to how it acted on the earth. The aim of man, therefore, is to achieve peace in the next life, not revelry, usury, arrogance, pleasure in this world for a short time, to be paid for with the most dreadful tortures forever and ever. Well, man does not know, or does not remember, or does not want to remember that truth. If he does not know, he is less guilty. If he does not remember, he is somewhat guilty, because the truth is to be kept alight, like a holy torch, in minds and hearts. But if man does not want to remember it, and when it, shines he closes his eyes not to see it, as he considers it as hateful as the voice of a pedantic rhetor, then his fault is grave, very grave indeed.

And yet God forgives it, if the soul disowns its wrong doing and proposes to pursue, for the rest of its life, man's true purpose, which is the conquest of eternal peace in the Kingdom of the true God. Have you so far followed an evil path? Are you downhearted and are you thinking that it is late to follow the right way? Are you desolate and are you saying: "I knew nothing of all this! And now I am ignorant and I do not know what to do"? No. Do not think that it is the same as with material matters and that it takes a long time and much work to start all over again, but in a holy manner. The bounty of the Eternal True Lord God is such that He will not make you walk back all the way to put you at the junction where, erring, you left the right path for the wrong one. His bounty is such, that from the moment you say: "I want to belong to the Truth", that is, to God, because God is Truth, God, through an entirely spiritual miracle, infuses Wisdom into you, whereby from being ignorant you become possessors of the supernatural Science, like those who have possessed it for years.

Wisdom means to want God, to love God, to cultivate one's soul, to tend to the Kingdom of God, repudiating everything that is flesh – world, Satan. Wisdom means obedience to the Law of God, which is the law of Charity, Obedience, Contenance, Honesty. *Wisdom means to love God with one's whole being and to love our neighbour as ourselves.* Those are the two essential elements to be wise in the Wisdom of God. And our neighbours are not only those of our own blood,

of our race and religion, but all men, whether rich or poor, wise or ignorant, Hebrews, proselytes, Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans...»

Jesus is interrupted by a threatening howling of some excited people. Jesus looks at them and says: «Yes. That is love. I am not a servile master. I speak the truth because that is what I must do to sow in you what is necessary to gain eternal Life. Whether you like it or not, I must tell you, to do My duty as Redeemer. It is for you to do your duty as souls needing Redemption. *So we must love our neighbour. All our neighbours.* And love them with a holy love, not in a questionable communion of interests, whereby a Roman, Phoenician or proselyte are "anathema" or viceversa, as long as there is no sensuality or money involved, whereas if you are anxious to share sensuality or money with them, they are no longer "anathema"..."»

The crowd is once again in an uproar, while the Romans, from their place in the hall exclaim: «By Jove! He does speak well!»

Jesus waits for the noise to calm down, then He resumes: «*We must love our neighbour as we would like to be loved ourselves.* Because we do not like to be ill-treated, harassed, robbed, oppressed, calumniated, insulted. Everybody has the same national or personal feelings. Do not let us do, therefore, the evil which we would not like done to us.

Wisdom means obedience to the ten Commandments of God:

"I am the Lord your God. You shall have no gods except Me. You shall have no idols and shall not worship them. You shall not utter the Name of God to misuse it. It is the Name of the Lord your God and God will punish those who use it without any reason, to curse it or to validate a sin. Remember to sanctify feast days. The Sabbath is sacred to the Lord, Who rested on it after Creation and blessed it and sanctified it. Honour your father and your mother that you may live peacefully for a long time on the earth and eternally in Heaven. You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour. You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet his wife, his servant, man or woman, or his ox, or his donkey or anything that belongs to him."

That is Wisdom. Who does that is wise and conquers Life and the Kingdom forever. So, as from today, propose to live according to Wisdom, by preferring it to the poor things of the earth.

What are you saying? Speak up. Are you saying that it is late? No. Listen to a parable.

A landowner went out at daybreak to hire workers for his vineyard and he made an agreement with them for one denarius a day. He went out again at the third hour and thinking that the workers he had hired were too few and seeing other people idle in the square waiting to be hired, he took them and said to them: "Go to my vineyard and I will give you what I promised the others." And they went. He went out again at the sixth hour and at the ninth and seeing some more workers, he said to them: "Will you work for me? I give my workers one denarius a day." They agreed and went. Finally he went out about the eleventh hour and saw some more standing in the sunshine and he asked them: "Why are you standing here idle? Are you not ashamed of standing here all day without doing anything?" "Because no one hired us for the day. We would have liked to work and earn our living. But no one asked us to go and work." "Well, I am asking you to go to my vineyard. Go and you will have the same pay as the others." He said so because he was a good landowner and felt sorry for the dejection of his neighbour.

In the evening, when the work was finished, the man called his bailiff and said: "Call the workers and pay them their wages, as agreed, beginning with the last arrivals, who are the most needy, as they have not had any food during the day, whereas the others have been fed once and some several times, and who out of gratitude to me, as I felt sorry for them, have worked harder than all the others; I, in fact, have been watching them. Then dismiss them so that they may go and rest, as they deserve, and may enjoy with their families the fruit of their work." And the bailiff did as the landowner ordered, and gave each man one denarius.

When the last ones came, those who had worked from daybreak, they were surprised at receiving one denarius each and they complained to the bailiff who said to them: "That is the order I was given. Go and complain to the landowner, not to me." And they went and said: "You have not been fair! We have worked for twelve hours, first in the dewy moisture, then in the heat of the sun and once again in the dampness of the evening, and you have given us the same wages you gave the lazy workers who worked for one hour only!... Why?" And one of them in particular raised his voice saying that he had been betrayed and exploited undeservedly.

"My friend, in what have I wronged you? What did I agree with you at daybreak? One full day's work and the wages of one denarius. Did I not?"

"Yes, that is true. But you have given the same wages to those who have worked much less..."

"Did you agree to that pay because it seemed fair?"

"Yes. I agreed because others pay less."

"Were you ill-treated by me?"

"In all conscience... no."

"I granted you a long rest during the day and I gave you some food, did I not? You had three meals. And food and rest were not agreed upon. Is that right?"

"Yes. They were not agreed upon."

"Why did you accept them, then?"

"Well... You said: 'I prefer to do so, so that you will not get tired going back home'. And we could hardly believe that it was true... Your food was good, and we saved, and..."

"It was a favour that I was doing you gratuitously and that none of you could pretend. Is that right?"

"That is true."

"So I did you a good turn. Well, why are you complaining? I should complain of you, because, although you realised that you were dealing with a good master, you worked lazily, whereas those who came after you and had one meal only, and the last arrivals who had none at all, set to work with a will and in a shorter time they did the same work that you did in twelve hours. I would have betrayed you if I had halved your wages to pay them. But that is not the case. So take what is yours and go away. Are you going to come to my house and impose me to do what suits you? I do what I like and what is fair. Don't be malicious and don't compel me to be unfair. For I am good."

I solemnly say to all of you who are listening to Me, that the Father God makes the same agreement with all men and promises the same reward to everybody. Those who serve the Lord diligently will be treated by Him with justice, even if they do little work, being close to death. I solemnly tell you that the first will not always be the first in the Kingdom of Heaven, where we shall see that the last are first and the first are last. We shall see there that men who do not come from Israel are holier than many men of Israel... I have come to call everybody, in the

name of God. But if many are called, few are chosen, because few want Wisdom. He is not wise who lives according to the world and to flesh, but not according to God. He is neither wise for the earth nor for Heaven. Because on the earth he will make enemies, will receive punishment and will feel remorse. And he will lose Heaven forever.

I repeat: be good to your neighbour, whoever he may be. Be obedient and leave to God the task of punishing those who are unjust in giving orders. Be continent by resisting sensuality, be honest by resisting gold, be coherent by saying anathema to what deserves it, not when it suits you, considering yourselves free to get in touch later with what you previously cursed. Do not do to other people what you would not like done to yourselves, and then...»

«Go away, You boring prophet! You have spoiled our market!... You have taken our customers away!...» shout the vendors, rushing into the yard... And those who had shouted previously in the yard, at the beginning of Jesus' sermon – not only Phoenicians, but also Jews who are in this town for reasons unknown to me – join the vendors insulting, threatening and above all driving away...

They do not like Jesus because He does not advise evil things... He crosses His arms and looks. He is sad, but solemn.

The people, divided into two parties, are quarrelling, defending or offending the Nazarene. Insults, praises, curses, blessings; some shout: «The Pharisees are right. You have sold Yourself to Rome. You are the lover of prostitutes and publicans». Some contradict them: «Be quiet, blasphemous tongues! You have sold yourselves to Rome, you infernal Phoenicians!», «You are demons!», «May hell swallow you!», «Go away!», «Go away, you thieves and usurers who have come to this market!» and so on...

The soldiers intervene saying: «Rather than an instigator, He is a victim!» And with their spears they drive everybody out of the yard and close the door.

Only the three proselyte brothers and the six disciples are left inside with Jesus. «Why on earth did you make Him speak?» the triarius asks the three brothers. «So many people speak!» replies Elias.

«Of course. But nothing happens, because they teach what people like. He does not. And He is a bore...» The old soldier stares at Jesus Who has got down off the case and is standing, apparently thinking of something else.

The crowds are still quarrelling outside. In fact more troops come from the

barracks led by the centurion himself. They knock at the door and have it opened, while some remain outside to drive away both those who shout: «Long live the King of Israel!» and those who curse Him.

The centurion comes forward and he looks worried. His anger explodes against old Aquila: «Is that how you protect Rome? By letting people acclaim a foreign king in a subject region?»

The old soldier salutes stiffly and replies: «He was teaching respect and obedience and was speaking of a kingdom not of this earth. That-is why they hate Him. Because He is good and respectful. There was no reason why I should enjoin silence on a man who was not offending our law.»

The centurion calms down and mumbles: «So it is another sedition of this foul mob... Well. Tell the man to go away at once. I do not want trouble here. Carry out my instructions and escort Him out of town as soon as the road is clear. He may go wherever He likes. To hell, if He wants. As long as He gets out of my jurisdiction. Have you understood?»

«Yes, we have, and we will act accordingly.»

The centurion turns round displaying his bright cuirass and causing his purple mantle to flutter, and he goes away without even looking at Jesus.

The three brothers say to the Master: «We are sorry...»

«It is no fault of yours. And be not afraid. No harm will happen to you. I tell you...»

The three change colour... Philip says: «How are You aware of our fear?»

Jesus smiles kindly, a smile which is like a ray of sunlight on His sad face: «I know what is in hearts and what is in the future.»

The soldiers are waiting in the sunshine casting sidelong glances and making comments... «Can they possibly love us, when they hate even that man who does not oppress them?»

«And who works miracles, you should say...»

«By Hercules! Who was it that came to tell us that there was a suspect to be watched?»

«It was Caius!»

«The zealous man! In the meantime we have missed our rations and I foresee that I am going to miss the kiss of a girl!... Ah!»

«Epicurean! Where is the beautiful girl?»

«I am certainly not going to tell you, my friend!»

«She is behind the potter's, at the Foundations. I know. I saw you there some nights ago...» says another one.

The triarius goes towards Jesus and walks round Him, looking at Him all the time. He does not know what to say... Jesus smiles to encourage him. The man does not know what to do... But he goes closer.

Jesus points to his scars: «All wounds, are they? So, you are a valiant and loyal soldier...»

The praise makes the old soldier blush.

«You have suffered very much for the sake of your Fatherland and of your emperor... Would you not be prepared to suffer something for a greater Fatherland: Heaven? For an eternal Emperor: God?»

The soldier shakes his head and says: «I am a poor pagan. But I may still arrive at the eleventh hour. But who will teach me? You have seen!... They are expelling You. And that is a wound which is sore, not mine!... At least I gave them back to my enemies. But what do You give those who hurt You?»

«Forgiveness, soldier. Forgiveness and love.»

«So, I am right. It is foolish to suspect You. Goodbye, Galilean.»

«Goodbye, Roman.»

Jesus is left alone until the three brothers and the disciples come back with some food, which the brothers offer to the soldiers, and the apostles to Jesus. They eat without relish, in the sunshine, whilst the soldiers eat and drink merrily.

Then a soldier goes out to have a look at the silent square. «We can go» he shouts. «They have all gone away. The patrols only are there.»

Jesus stands up submissively, He blesses and comforts the three brothers, with whom He fixes an appointment for Passover at Gethsemane, and He goes out, escorted by the soldiers, and followed by the mortified disciples. They proceed along the empty road until they reach the country.

«Hail, Galilean» says the triarius.

«Goodbye, Aquila. Please, do not ill-treat Daniel, Elias and Philip. I only am the guilty one. Tell the centurion.»

«I will not tell him anything. He has already forgotten all about it and the three brothers supply us with many good things, particularly with the Cyprus wine that the centurion loves more than his own life. Go in peace. Goodbye.»

They part. The soldiers go back to the gate, Jesus and His disciples set out eastwards towards the silent countryside.

329. The Sons of Thunder. Going towards Achzib with the Shepherd Annas.

14th November 1945.

Jesus is walking across a very mountainous region. The mountains are not high, but the road runs up and down hills all the time; and there are many torrents, which flow merrily in the cool fresh season, and are as clear as the sky and as fresh as the first leaves that are beginning to grow more and more copiously on the trees. But although the season is so beautiful and cheerful as to comfort one's heart, Jesus' humour does not appear to be much relieved and the apostles look even more worried than He is. They are walking very quietly along the bottom of a valley. Shepherds and flocks are the only visible life. But Jesus does not even seem to see them.

A down-hearted sigh of James of Zebedee and his sudden words, the obvious result of a concerned mind, draw Jesus' attention... James says: «And defeats!... and defeats!... We seem to be cursed...»

Jesus lays a hand on his shoulder: «Do you not know that that is the lot of the better ones?»

«Eh! I know since I have been with You! But now and again we would need something different, which we did get in the past, to cheer up hearts and faith...»

«Do you doubt Me, James?» How much grief there is in Jesus' trembling voice.

«No!...» His “no” is certainly not a very definite one.

«But you do doubt. What, then? Do you no longer love Me as you did before? The fact that you have seen Me expelled, derided, or only neglected near the Phoenician borders, has perhaps weakened your love, has it?» There is deep grief in Jesus' trembling words, although there are no sobs or tears. His very soul is weeping.

«No, my Lord, not that! On the contrary, the more I see You misunderstood, rejected, humiliated, afflicted, the more my love for You increases. And I would willingly offer my life as a sacrifice, in order not to see You thus, and to be able to change the hearts of men. You must believe me. Do not crush my heart, which is already so depressed, by doubting that I do not love You. Otherwise... otherwise I will go to extremes. I will go back and I will revenge myself upon those who grieve You, to prove that I love You, to remove Your doubt, and if they catch me and kill me, I will not care in the least. I will be satisfied with giving You a proof of my love.»

«Oh! son of thunder! Whence so much impetuosity? Do you want to be an exterminating thunderbolt?» Jesus smiles at the ardour and intentions of James.

«Oh! At least I see You smile! That is already one result of my intentions. What do you say, John? Shall we carry out my intentions to relieve the Master, Who is depressed because of so many repulses?»

«Oh! yes. Let us go. We will go back and speak to them. And if they still insult Him saying that He is king only by word, or is a laughing-stock king, a penniless or a mad king, we will give them a good thrashing until they realise that the king has an army of faithful men, who are not prepared to stand their mockery. Violence can be useful at times. Let's go, brother!» John replies to him, and angry as he is, he seems to be another man, so different from the ever mild John.

Jesus places Himself between the two, catches them by the arms to hold them back and says: «Just listen to them! And what have I been preaching for such a long time? Oh! What a wonderful surprise! Also John, My dove, has become a hawk! Look how ugly, gloomy, perturbed he looks, disfigured by hatred. Oh! shame! And you are surprised because some Phoenicians remain indifferent, some Jews are resentful, some Romans expelled Me, while you are the first who have not understood anything after being with Me for two years, and you have become gall because of the hatred in your hearts, and you cast My doctrine of love and forgiveness out of your hearts and you reject it as if it were a foolish

thing, and you welcome violence as a good ally! Oh! Holy Father! This is a defeat indeed! Instead of being hawks sharpening their beaks and claws, would it not be better if you were angels praying the Father to give relief to His Son? When has a storm ever done any good with its thunderbolts and hailstones? Well, in memory of this sin of yours against Charity, in memory of the moment when I saw the animal-man come to light on your faces instead of the man-angel whom I always wish to see in you, I will call you “the sons of thunder”.»

Jesus is half serious while speaking to the two excited sons of Zebedee. But His reproach does not last long, because as soon as they repent He clasps them both to His heart, His face shining with love, saying: «Never again I want to see you like that. And thank you for your love. And thank you for yours, My friends» He says addressing Andrew, Matthew and His two cousins. «Come here, that I may embrace you as well. Do you not know, that if I had nothing else but the joy of doing the will of My Father and your love, I would always be happy, even if the whole world smacked Me? I am sad, not about Myself, or about My defeats, as you call them, but because I feel sorry for the souls that reject Life. Good, we are all happy now, are we not, you big babies? Come on, then. Go to those shepherds who are milking the sheep and ask them to give you some milk in the name of God. Be not afraid» He says seeing the desolate look of the apostles. «Obey with faith. You will get milk, not a thrashing, even if the man is a Phoenician.»

And the six go off while Jesus waits for them on the road. And the sad Jesus, Whom no one wants, prays in the meantime...

The apostles come back with a little pail of milk, and they say: «The man asks You to go over there, he wants to speak to You, but he cannot leave his unreliable goats to young shepherds.»

Jesus says: «Well, let us go there and eat their bread.» And they go to the edge of the ditch where the goats are chewing precariously. «Thank you for the milk you have given Me. What do you want of Me?»

«You are the Nazarene, are You not? The one who works miracles?»

«I am the one who preaches Eternal Salvation. I am the Way to go to the true God, the Truth that gives itself, the Life that enlivens you. I am not a wizard that works wonders. The miracles that I work are a manifestation of My goodness and of your weakness that needs proofs in order to believe. But what do you want of Me?»

«Well... Were You at Alexandroscene two days ago?»

«Yes, I was. Why?»

«I was there, too, with my kids, and when I realised that there was going to be a quarrel, I went away, because they are in the habit of stirring up trouble to steal what is in the market. They are thieves, all of them: the Phoenicians... and the others. I should not say so because I am the son of a proselyte father and a Syrian mother and a proselyte myself. But it is the truth. Well. Let us go back to my story. I took shelter in a stable with my kids, waiting for my son's cart. And in the evening, when I was leaving the town, I met a woman, who was weeping, with her little daughter in her arms. She had walked eight miles to come to You. Because she lives out in the country. I asked her what was the matter, as she is a proselyte. She had come to sell some goods and do some shopping. She had heard of You and hope had filled her heart. She ran home to get the little girl. But one walks slowly with a load. When she arrived at the warehouse of the brothers, You were no longer there. The brothers said to her: "They expelled Him. But last night He told us that He would go back via the steps of Tyre." As I am a father, too, I said to her: "Well, go there." But she replied to me: "If after what happened He goes back to Galilee by a different road?" I said to her: "Now listen. It is either that road or the one along the border. I am pasturing my flock between Rohob and Lesemdan, on the border road between here and Naphtali. If I see Him I will tell Him, I promise you on my honour." And I have told You.»

«And may God reward you. I will go to the woman. I Must go back to Achzib.»

«Are You going to Achzib? Well, we can go together, if You do not scorn the company of a shepherd.»

«I scorn no one. Why are you going to Achzib?»

«Because my lambs are there. Unless... I have lost them all.»

«Why?»

«Because there is a disease... I do not know whether it was witchcraft or something else. I know that my lovely flock has been taken ill. That is why I brought the goats here, as they are still healthy and I keep them away from the sheep. Two of my sons will look after them here. They are now in town, shopping. But I am going back there, to see them die, my beautiful woolly sheep...» The man sighs... He looks at Jesus and he apologises: «It is foolish to speak to You of these things, considering who You are, and to distress You, as

You must be already distressed by the way they treat You. But our sheep are love and money to us, You know?...»

«I understand. But they will recover. Did you get anyone, who is familiar with these things, to see them?»

«Oh! They have all said the same thing: "Kill them and sell the skins. There is nothing else to be done", and they have also threatened me if I take them about... They are afraid of the disease... for their own sheep. So I have to keep them in and they die quicker. They are bad, You know, those of Achzib.»

Jesus says simply: «I know.»

«I say that they have bewitched them...»

«No. Do not believe such nonsense... Will you be leaving at once when your sons arrive?»

«Yes, I will. They will be here any moment now. Are these Your disciples? Only these?»

«No. I have more.»

«Why do they not come here? Once, I met a group of them near Merom. A shepherd was their head. So they said. A tall strong man, Elias was his name. It was in October, I think. Either before or after the Tabernacles. Has he left You now?»

«None of My disciples have left Me.»

«I was told.»

«What?»

«That You... that the Pharisees... In short, that Your disciples had left You because they were afraid, and that You were...»

«A demon. You may say it. I know. Double merit for you, as you believe just the same.»

«And because of that merit, could You not... but perhaps I am asking for a sacrilege...»

«Tell Me. If it is wicked, I will let you know.»

«Could You not bless my flock, when passing by?» the man says very

anxiously...

«I will bless your flock. This one...» and He raises His hand blessing the goats scattered around «... and your flock of sheep. Do you believe that My blessing will save them?»

«As You save men from diseases, so You must be able to save animals. They say that You are the Son of God. Sheep were created by God. So they belong to the Father. I... did not know whether it was respectful to ask You. But if it is possible, please do it, Lord, and I will take large offerings to the Temple. Nay, I will not! I will give them to You for the poor. It will be better.»

Jesus smiles and is silent. The shepherd's sons arrive and shortly afterwards Jesus, the apostles and the old man set out, leaving the young men to look after the goats. They walk fast as they want to reach Kedesh soon and then proceed at once towards the road that from the sea takes to the mainland. It must be the road that forks at the foot of the promontory, the one they took going to Alexandrosene. At least that is what I understand from the conversation of the shepherd with the disciples. Jesus is ahead of them, all alone.

«But shall we not have further trouble?» asks James of Alphaeus.

«Kedesh is not in the jurisdiction of the centurion. It is outside the Phoenician border. And if one does not provoke them, centurions do not interfere with religion.»

«In any case we are not stopping...»

«Will you be able to cover more than thirty miles in one day?» asks the shepherd.

«Oh! We are perpetual untiring pilgrims!»

They walk on... They reach Kedesh and pass by it without any trouble. They take the straight road. Achzib is indicated on the milestone. The shepherd points it out saying: «We shall be there tomorrow. You will come with me tonight. I know farmers in the valleys, but many of them are within the Phoenician borders... Well... we will cross the frontier. And we will certainly not be found out... Oh! Their vigilance! They had better look out for robbers!...»

The sun sets and daylight is dimmed in the woody valleys. But the shepherd is familiar with the road and proceeds resolutely.

They reach a little village, just a handful of houses.

«If they give us hospitality here, we shall be with Israelites. We are at the border. If they will not take us in, we will go to another village, a Phoenician one.»

«I am not biased, man.»

They knock at a door.

«Is that you, Annas? With friends? Come in, and may God be with you» says an elderly woman.

They go into a large kitchen, with a gaily blazing fireplace. The members of a large family of all ages are sitting round the table but they kindly make room for the new arrivals.

«This is Jonah. This is his wife, his sons and grandchildren and daughters-in-law. A family of patriarchs faithful to the Lord» says Annas, the shepherd, to Jesus. He then addresses old Jonah: «And this man who is with me is the Rabbi of Israel, Whom you wanted to meet.»

«I bless the Lord that I can give you hospitality as I have room tonight. And I bless the Rabbi Who has come to my house, and I ask Him to bless us.»

Annas explains that Jonah's house is like an inn for pilgrims travelling from the sea to the mainland.

They all sit down in the warm kitchen and the women serve the guests. There is so much respect that it is almost embarrassing. But Jesus overcomes the difficulty by gathering all the children around Him, when the meal is over, and taking an interest in them, and they soon fraternise. And after the children, in the short time between supper and bedtime, also the men in the house become bold and they inform Jesus of what they have learned about the Messiah and ask Him questions. And Jesus explains, confirms, rectifies in a kind peaceful conversation, until both guests and members of the household go to rest, after Jesus has blessed them all.

330. The Cananean Mother.**15th November 1945.**

«Is the Master with you?» the old farmer Jonah asks Judas Thaddeus who is entering the kitchen, where the fire is already blazing to warm the milk and the room, which is rather chilly in the early hours of a beautiful end of January morning, I think, or early February.

«He must have gone out to pray. He often goes out at dawn, when He knows He can be alone. He will be here shortly. Why are you asking?»

«I have asked also the others, who have gone out looking for Him, because there is a woman in the next room, with my wife. She comes from a village on the other side of the border, and I don't really know how she found out that the Master is here. But she knows and she wants to speak to Him.»

«All right. She will speak to Him. Perhaps she is the woman He is expecting, with her little sick daughter. Her spirit must have brought her here.»

«No. She is alone. There are no children with her. I know her because our villages are close to each other... and the valley belongs to everybody. In any case I do not think that we should be rude to our neighbours, even if they are Phoenicians, if we wish to serve the Lord. I may be wrong, but...»

«Also the Master always says that we must be merciful to everybody.»

«He is merciful, is He not?»

«He is indeed.»

«Annas told me that He was ill-treated even recently. Always ill-treated!... In Judaea, in Galilee, everywhere. Why is Israel so bad to its Messiah? I am referring to the mighty ones in Israel. Because the people love Him.»

«How are you aware of such things?»

«Oh! I live here, far away. But I am a faithful Israelite. It is sufficient to go to the Temple on holy days of obligation to learn all the good and all the evil! But one hears more of evil things than of good ones because good is humble and does not praise itself. Those who receive it should proclaim it. But only few people are grateful after receiving a grace. Man receives assistance and forgets it... Evil instead blows its trumpets loud and has its words heard even by those who do not want to hear them. You, His disciples, are you not aware of how

much they run down and accuse the Messiah in the Temple! In their teaching the scribes speak of nothing else. I think they must have made a collection of lessons on how to accuse the Master as well as a collection of facts that they exhibit as plausible charges against Him. And one's conscience must be righteous, firm and free to be able to resist and judge wisely. Is He aware of such manoeuvres?»

«He is aware of everything. And we are more or less aware as well. But He does not worry. He continues His work and disciples and believers in Him are increasing day by day.»

«God grant they may persevere until the end. But man changes his mind. And weak... Here is the Master coming towards the house with three disciples.»

And the old man goes out, followed by Judas Thaddeus, to pay his respects to Jesus, whose appearance is imposing while He walks towards the house.

«Peace be with you today and always, Jonah.»

«Glory and peace to You, Master, forever.»

«Peace to you, Judas. Have Andrew and John not come back yet?»

«No. I did not hear them go out. I did not hear anybody. I was fast asleep.»

«Come in, Master. Come in, everybody. The air is cool this morning. It must have been very cold in the wood. There is warm milk for everybody over there.»

They are taking their milk and everybody, with the exception of Jesus, dips large slices of bread into it, when Andrew and John arrive with Annas, the shepherd.

«Ah! You are here! We had come back to tell the rest that we had not found You...» exclaims Andrew.

Jesus wishes peace to the three and adds: «Quick. Take your share and let us leave because I want to be at least at the foot of the mountain of Achzib before evening. The Sabbath begins this evening.»

«What about my sheep?»

Jesus smiles and replies: «They will recover after I bless them.»

«But they are on the eastern side of the mountain! You are going westwards to see that woman...»

«Leave it to God, and He will see to everything.»

The meal is over and the apostles go upstairs to get their travelling bags and be ready to leave.

«Master... that woman in the next room... are You not listening to her?»

«I have no time, Jonah. I have a long way to go and in any case I have come for the sheep of Israel. Goodbye, Jonah. May God reward you for your charity. I bless you and all your relatives. Let us go...»

But the old man begins to shout at the top of his voice: «Children! Women! The Master is going away! Come, quick!»

As a brood of chicks scattered in a stack-yard rush towards the broody-hen calling them, so women and men – some already busy, some still half asleep – rush from every side, together with half-naked children who are smiling although they have just woken up... They all gather round Jesus, Who is in the middle of the threshing-floor, and the mothers envelop their children in their wide skirts to protect them from the cool air, or they hold them in their arms until a maid-servant brings their clothes and puts them on them.

Also a woman, who is not of the household, comes forth. A poor weeping shy woman... She stoops and comes forward almost creeping and when she reaches the group where Jesus is, she begins to shout: «Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is tormented very badly by a demon who makes her do shameful things. Have mercy on me because I am suffering so much, as everybody sneers at me because of that, as if my child were guilty of what she does... Have mercy, O Lord, You can do everything. Raise Your voice and Your hand and order the unclean spirit to go out of Palma. She is my only daughter and I am a widow... Oh! don't go away! Mercy!...»

Jesus, in fact, after blessing each member of the household and reproaching the elder ones for telling people of His arrival there – and they justify themselves saying: «We have not said anything, believe us, Lord!» – goes away; He is inexplicably hard towards the poor woman, who is dragging herself along on her knees with her arms stretched out in suppliant attitude, while she says panting: «I saw You yesterday while You were crossing the torrent and I heard them call You: "Master." I followed You, among the bushes, and I heard what these people were saying. I understood who You are... And I came here this morning before daybreak and I remained here, on the threshold, like a little dog, until

Sarah got up and made me go in. Have mercy, my Lord, on a mother and a little girl!»

But Jesus is walking fast and turns a deaf ear to her entreaties.

The people of the household say to her: «Resign yourself! He will not listen to you. He said so Himself: He has come for the children of Israel...»

She is desperate but at the same time full of faith, and she stands up saying: «No. I will pray until He listens to me.» And she follows the Master shouting her entreaties, which draw to the doors of the houses in the village all those who are already awake and who, like the people of Jonah's household, begin to follow her to see what happens.

In the meantime the apostles, seized with astonishment, look at one another and whisper: «Why is He doing that? He has never done it before!...»

And John says: «He cured also those two people at Alexandrosene.»

«But they were proselytes» replies Thaddeus.

«And what about the woman He is going to cure now?»

«She is a proselyte as well» says the shepherd Annas.

«Oh! but how many times has He cured Gentiles or heathens! And what about the Roman girl?...» says Andrew desolately, as he cannot set his mind at rest seeing Jesus' harsh behaviour towards the Cananean woman.

«I will tell you what it is» exclaims James of Zebedee. «The Master is angry. His patience has come to an end before so many attacks of human wickedness. Can't you see how changed He is? He is quite right! From now on He will devote Himself only to those with whom He is familiar. And He is doing the right thing!»

«Good. But in the meantime this woman is following us howling and a train of people are coming behind her. Although He does not want to be noticed, He has found the way to draw even the attention of trees...» grumbles Matthew.

«Let us go and tell Him to send her away... Look at the lovely procession there is behind us! If we arrive at the consular road like this, we will be in trouble! And she will not leave us unless He drives her away...» says Thaddeus who is very annoyed. He even turns round and says to the woman in a commanding voice: «Be quiet and go away!». And James of Alphaeus is solid for his brother.

But she is not impressed by threats or orders and continues to implore.

«Let us go and tell the Master to send her away, since He does not want to hear her. This cannot go on!» says Matthew, while Andrew whispers: «Poor woman!», and John repeats continuously: «I do not understand... I do not understand...» John is dumbfounded at Jesus' behaviour.

They quicken their pace and reach the Master Who is walking as fast as if He were chased. «Master, please dismiss that woman! It's a scandal! She is shouting after us! She is pointing us out to everybody! The road is getting more and more crowded with people... and many are following her. Tell her to go away.»

«You can tell her yourselves. I have already replied to her.»

«She will not listen to us. Please! You must tell her. And very severely.»

Jesus stops and turns round. The woman takes it as a sign of grace, she quickens her step, she raises the already shrill tone of her voice while her face becomes pale with her increased hope.

«Be quiet, woman. And go home. I have already told you. I have come for the sheep of Israel. To cure the ones that are ill and find the ones that are lost. You are not from Israel.»

But the woman is already at His feet and she kisses them, worshipping Him, holding His ankles tight, as if she were a ship-wrecked person who had found a rock of salvation, and she moans: «Lord, help me! You can help me, Lord. Give the order to the demon, since You are holy... Lord, You are the master of everything, of graces and of the world. Everything is subject to You, my Lord. I know. I believe it. Take therefore Your power and use it for my daughter.»

«It is not right to take the bread of the children of the house and throw it to the dogs in the street.»

«I believe in You. And through my faith, from a dog of the street I have become a dog of the house. I told You: I came before daybreak to lie down on the threshold of the house in which You were, and if You had come out there, You would have trampled on me. But You went out from the other side and did not see me. You did not see this poor distressed dog, starving for Your grace, waiting to go in, creeping, where You were, to kiss Your feet, imploring You not to drive it away...»

«It is not right to throw the bread of the children to dogs» repeats Jesus.

«But dogs go into the room where the landlord is eating with his children, and they eat what falls from the table, or the remnants of food, which the family gives them, as they are of no further use. I am not asking You to treat me as a daughter and let me sit at Your table. But give me at least the crumbs...»

Jesus smiles. Oh! What a transfiguration that joyful smile works on His face!...

The people, the apostles, the woman look at Him with admiration... they realise that something is about to happen.

And Jesus says: «Oh! woman! Great is your faith. And you comfort My spirit by it. Go, therefore, and it will be done to you as you wish. As from this moment, the demon has gone out of your daughter. Go in peace. And as from a stray dog you wanted to be a dog of the house, endeavour in the future to be a daughter sitting at the table of the Father. Goodbye.»

«Oh! Lord! My Lord!... I would like to run away and see my beloved Palma... And I would like to stay with You, and follow You! Blessed! Holy!»

«Go, woman. Go in peace.»

And Jesus resumes His way while the Cananean woman, more agile than a young girl, runs away along the road she came, followed by the crowd anxious to see the miracle...

«But, Master, why did You make her implore You so much, before listening to her?» asks James of Zebedee.

«Through your fault and the fault of all of you. That is not a defeat, James. I was not expelled, derided or cursed here... Let that be a relief to your disheartened spirits. I have already had today My most delicious food. And I bless God for it. And now let us go and see this other woman who believes and can wait with firm faith.»

«And what about my sheep, Lord? In a short while I should take a road, which is different from Yours, to go to my grazing ground...»

Jesus smiles but does not reply.

It is beautiful to walk now that the sun warms the air and makes the new leaves of woods and the grass of meadows sparkle like emeralds, changing each flower-cup into a setting for the drops of dew shining on the many-coloured wild flowers. And Jesus proceeds smiling. And the apostles, immediately-

relieved, follow Him smiling...

They reach the road-junction. The shepherd Annas, who looks mortified, says: «And I should leave You here... Are You really not coming to cure my sheep? I believe, too; and I am a proselyte... Promise, at least, that You will come after the Sabbath!»

«Oh! Annas! Is it possible that you have not yet understood that your sheep were cured when I raised My hand near Lesemdan? You may go, too, to see the miracle and to bless the Lord.»

I think that Lot's wife, when she was turned into a pillar of salt, was very much like the shepherd, who has remained as he was, a little bent forward, with his face looking up to see Jesus, with one arm half stretched out in mid-air... He looks like a statue. And a label could be placed under it: "The Petitioner." He then comes round and prostrates himself saying: «You are blessed! Holy! Good!... But I promised You a lot of money, and I have only a few drachmae with me... Come to see me after the Sabbath...»

«I will come. Not for the money, but to bless you once again for your simple faith. Goodbye, Annas. Peace be with you.»

And they part...

«And that was not a defeat either, My friends! Neither have they derided, expelled or cursed Me here... Come on, quick! There is a mother who has been waiting for us for days...»

And their march continues, with a short rest to eat some bread and cheese and drink at a spring...

It is midday when they see the road junction appear.

«That is where the steps of Tyre begin, over there» says Matthew. And he cheers up considering that they have covered most of the road.

Leaning on a Roman mile stone there is a woman. At her feet, on a folding-seat there is a little girl, about seven or eight years old. The woman is looking in all directions. Towards the steps in the rock. Towards the Ptolemais road. Towards the road on which Jesus is walking, and now and again she bends to caress her child, to protect her head from the sun with a piece of cloth, to cover her feet and hands with a shawl...

«There is the woman! I wonder where she slept these past days?» asks Andrew.

«Perhaps in that house near the cross-road. There are no other houses nearby» replies Matthew.

«Or out in the open» says James of Alphaeus.

«No. Not with the child, surely!» replies his brother.

Jesus does not speak. But He smiles. All in a row, with in the centre, three on each side, they take up all the road, at this time of the day, when travellers stop to eat, wherever they happen to be at midday. Jesus, tall, handsome, in the centre of the row, smiles and His face is so radiant that all the light of the sun seems to be concentrated on it while rays of light emanate from it.

The woman looks up... They are now about fifty meters apart. Jesus stares at her, which perhaps draws her attention, diverted for a moment by the child's weeping. She looks at Him and in an involuntary gesture of anxiety, she presses her hands against her heart.

Jesus smiles more broadly. And His bright inexpressible smile must tell the woman a great deal, as she is no longer anxious, but smiling, as if she were already happy, she bends to pick up her child, and holding her in the folding-seat, with stretched out arms, as if she offered her to God, she comes forwards, and when she arrives at Jesus' feet, she kneels down, lifting as much as she can the child in the seat, who looks ecstatically at Jesus' most handsome face.

The woman does not say one word. And what else could she say that is not already deeply expressed in her whole attitude?...

And Jesus says but one word, a little, but powerful gladdening word, like God's «Fiat» at the creation of the world: «Yes.» And He lays his hand on the chest of the little girl.

And the child, with the cry of a woodlark freed from a cage, shouts: «Mummy!» and all of a sudden sits up and slides down on to her feet and embraces her mother, who, exhausted as she is, staggers and is on the point of falling back, in a swoon brought about by tiredness, by anxiety that is calming down, by joy that overwhelms the strength of her heart, already weak by so much suffering.

Jesus is ready to hold her. A much stronger support than the little girl's, who overburdening her mother with her own weight, is certainly not the best means to support her mother on her knees. Jesus makes her sit down and instills

strength into her... And He looks at her while silent tears stream down the tired but happy face of the woman. Then words come to her lips: «Thank You, my Lord! Thanks and blessings! My hope has been crowned... I waited for You so long... But I am happy now...»

The woman, after she comes round, kneels down once again, worshipping, holding the little girl in front of her, while Jesus caresses the child. And she explains: «A bone had been rotting in her back for two years, paralysing her and leading her slowly to death with great pain. We had her visited by doctors at Antioch, Tyre, Sidon and even at Caesarea and Paneas, and we spent so much on doctors and medicines that we were compelled to sell the house we had in town and retire to the one in the country, dismissing the servants of the house and keeping only those who worked in the fields, selling the crops that we used to consume ourselves... But nothing helped her! I saw You. I was aware of what You have done elsewhere. I hoped to receive grace myself... And I did! I will now go back home, without any worries, and thoroughly happy... and I will make my husband happy... It was my James who set hope in my heart by telling me what Your power works in Galilee and Judaea. Oh! Had we not been afraid of not finding You, we would have come with the girl. But You are always traveling around!...»

«And traveling I came to you... But where did you stay these past days?»

«In that house... But at night only the child was in there. There is a good woman who looked after her for me. I remained here all the time, because I was afraid that You might pass by at night.»

Jesus lays a hand on her head: «You are a good mother. That is why God loves you. You can see that He has helped you in every way.»

«Oh! Yes! I could perceive it when I was coming here. I came to town hoping to see You, so I had little money with me and I was alone. Then, following the advice of that man, I came here. I sent word home and I came... and I have never lacked anything: neither bread, nor shelter, nor courage.»

«With that weight on your arms all the time? Could you not get a cart?..» asks James of Alphaeus, who is moved to pity.

«No. She would have suffered too much: it would have been enough to kill her. My Johanna came to Grace in the arms of her mother.»

Jesus caresses both of them on their heads: «You may go now and be always

faithful to the Lord. May the Lord and My peace be with you.»

Jesus resumes walking on the road to Ptolemais.

«And that is not a defeat either, My friends. And I was not expelled, derided or cursed here either.»

Following the straight road they soon reach the forge near the bridge. The Roman farrier is resting in the sunshine, sitting against the wall of his house. He recognises Jesus and greets Him. Jesus returns the greeting and says: «Will you allow Me to stop here and rest a little, while we eat some bread?»

«Of course, Rabbi. My wife wanted to see You... because I told her what she had not heard of Your speech the last time You were here. Esther is Hebrew. But since I am a Roman, I did not dare to tell You. I would have sent her after You...»

«Call her, then.» And Jesus sits on the bench against the wall, while James of Zebedee hands out bread and cheese...

A woman about forty years old comes out, she looks embarrassed and blushes.

«Peace to you, Esther. Have you been anxious to meet Me? Why?»

«Because of what You said... Rabbis despise us, because we are married to Romans... But I have children and I have taken them all to the Temple and the boys have all been circumcised. I told Titus beforehand, when he wanted to marry me... And he is good... And he leaves me completely free with the children. Everything is Hebrew here, customs, rites!... But rabbis and heads of synagogues curse us. You don't... You have compassionate words for us. Oh! Do You know what that means to us? It is like being embraced by our fathers and mothers, who disowned us and cursed us and are severe with us... It is like going back to the homes we left and not feeling like strangers in them... Titus is kind. On our holy days he closes the farriery, with a heavy loss of money, and takes me and the children to the Temple. Because he says that one cannot live without religion. He says that his religion is now his family and his work, as previously it was his duty as a soldier... But I... my Lord... I wanted to speak to You about one thing... You said that the followers of the true God must take a little of their holy yeast and put it into the good flour to make it rise holily. I have done that with my husband. I have tried, during the twenty years we have been together, to work his soul, which is good, with the yeast of Israel. But he cannot make up his mind... and he is old... I would like to have him with me in

the next life... United by faith as we are now by love... I am not asking for riches, welfare, health. What we have is sufficient, praised be the Lord for it! But that is what I would like... Pray for my husband! That he may belong to the true God...»

«He will. You may be sure of that. You are asking for something holy and it will be granted to you. You have understood the duty of a wife to God and to her husband. I wish all wives did! I solemnly tell you that many of them should imitate you. Continue like that and you will have the joy of having your Titus beside you, in prayer and in Heaven. Now show Me your children.»

The woman calls her numerous issue: «Jacob, Judas, Levi, Mary, John, Anne, Eliza, Marcus.» She then goes into the house and comes out again with one who can hardly walk and one of three months, at most: «And this one is Isaac and this little one is Judith» she says ending the introductions.

«Plenty!» says James of Zebedee laughing.

And Judas exclaims: «Six boys! And everyone circumcised! And with pure names! Very good!»

The woman is happy and she praises Jacob, Judas and Levi, who help their father «every day except on Sabbaths, when Titus works by himself shoeing horses with shoes made previously» she says. And she praises Mary and Anne «who help their mother.» But she does not forget to praise also the four little ones «as they are good and not naughty. Titus helps me to bring them up, as he was a disciplined soldier» she says casting a loving glance at the man, who, leaning against the door post, with a hand resting on his side, has listened to everything his wife has said, with a hearty smile on his honest face, and who now becomes elated hearing his merits as a soldier being mentioned.

«Very well. *The discipline of the army is not disliked by God, when soldiers do their duty humanely.* The essential point is to be always morally honest, in every task, in order to be always virtuous. Your past discipline, which you now instill into your children, must prepare you to enter a higher service: the service of God. We must part now. I will just manage to reach Achzib before sunset. Peace to you, Esther, and to your house. May you all belong to the Lord, before long.»

The mother and children kneel down while Jesus raises His hand blessing them. The man, as if he were once again a soldier of Rome in front of his emperor, stands stiffly at attention and salutes in Roman style.

And they go away... After a few steps Jesus lays a hand on James' shoulder: «And once again, the fourth time today, I would point out to you that that was not a defeat, and We were not expelled, derided, cursed... What do you say about it now?»

«That I am a fool, my Lord» says James of Zebedee impulsively.

«No. You, and all the others, are still and always too human and you have all the alternatives of those who are ruled more by their human nature than by their spirits. When the spirit is sovereign, it is not affected by every breath of wind that cannot always be a scented breeze... It may suffer, but will not change. I always pray that you may reach such sovereignty of spirit. But you must help Me with your efforts... Well! We have come to the end of our journey. During it I have sown what is necessary to prepare the work for you, when you will be evangelizing. We can now begin our Sabbath rest with the consciousness that we have done our duty. And we shall wait for the others... Then we shall set out... again... always... until everything is accomplished...»

331. Bartholomew Has Understood and Suffered.

17th November 1945.

Jesus is with the six apostles in a room where there are some very poor beds, placed very close to one another. The free space is barely sufficient to let them go from one end of the room to the other. They eat their very plain food sitting on the beds, because there are no chairs or table in the room. At one point, John goes and sits on the window-sill, to be in the sunshine. That is why he is the first to see Peter, Simon, Philip and Bartholomew coming towards the house. He shouts to them and then runs out followed by all the rest. Only Jesus remains inside and He stands up and turns towards the door...

The new arrivals come in. It is easy to imagine the exuberance of Peter, as it is easy to imagine the deep respect of Simon Zealot. But the attitude of Philip and particularly of Bartholomew is a real surprise. I would say that when they come in they look afraid and worried, and although Jesus opens His arms wide towards them, to exchange the kiss of peace, which He has already given Peter and Simon, they fall on their knees, and bend their foreheads to the floor, kissing

Jesus' feet, and they remain thus... and Bartholomew's stifled sighs indicate that he is weeping silently on Jesus' feet.

«What is worrying you, Bart? Are you not coming to be embraced by your Master? And you, Philip, why are you so timid? If I did not know that you are two honest people, in whose hearts no wickedness can dwell, I should suspect that you are guilty. But it is not so. Come, therefore! I have been waiting so long to receive your kisses and see the limpid look of your faithful eyes...»

«So have we... Lord...» says Bartholomew raising his face on which tears shine. «We have desired nothing but You, and we have been wondering how we might have displeased You to deserve to be kept away from You for such a long time. And we thought that it was unfair... But now we know... Oh! forgive us, Lord! We ask You to forgive us. I, in particular, because Philip was separated from You because of me. And I have already asked him to forgive me. I... I am the guilty one, I... the old Israelite, who is so reluctant to change, and who has grieved You...»

Jesus bends and forces him to stand up, as He forces Philip and He embraces them together saying: «But of what are you accusing yourself? You have done nothing wrong. Neither has Philip. You are My dear apostles, and today I am very happy to have you here with Me, re-united forever...»

«No... For a long time we have been unaware of the reason why You rightly distrusted us to the extent of excluding us from the apostolic family. But now we know... and we ask You to forgive us, and I in particular ask You, Jesus, my Master...» And Bartholomew looks at Him full of anxiety, of love and compassion. Old as he is, he seems a father who looks at his afflicted son and scans his face thinned by grief, which he had not noticed, neither had he noticed how that face had thinned and aged... And fresh tears stream down Bartholomew's cheeks. And he exclaims: «But what have they done to You? What have they done to us, to make us all suffer like this? An evil spirit seems to have come among us to upset us, to make us sad, weak, listless, foolish... So stupid that we did not understand that You were suffering... On the contrary we increased Your suffering through our meanness, dullness, respect for public opinion and our old humanity... Yes, the old man has always triumphed in us, and Your perfect vitality has never been able to renew us. That is what disturbs me! Notwithstanding all my love, I have not been able to change, to understand You and follow You... I have followed You only with my body... But You wanted us to follow You with our souls... to understand Your perfection... in

order to be able to perpetuate You... Oh! My Master! You will leave us one day, after so many struggles, snares, so much disgust and sorrow, and You will be grieved seeing that we are still unprepared!...» And Bartholomew inclines his head on Jesus' shoulder and weeps desolately, afflicted with the knowledge that he has been a dull disciple.

«Do not lose heart, Nathanael. You see all that like an absurdity that surprises you. But your Jesus knew that you are men... and He does not expect more than you can give. Oh! You will give Me everything. But now you must grow and be perfected... It is slow work. But I can wait. And I rejoice at your perfecting. Because it is a continuous improvement in My Life. Also your tears, also the harmony among those who were with Me, also the kindness that follows the harshness typical of your nature, and comes about after selfishness and spiritual greed, even your present gravity, everything is a stage of your growing in Me. So, do not worry. Set your mind at rest, for I know. Everything. Your honesty, your good faith, your generosity, your sincere love. Should I doubt My wise Bart and Philip, so sensible and loyal? I would wrong My Father, Who granted Me to have you among My dearest ones. Now... Let us sit down here, and those who have already rested can look-after their tired hungry brothers giving them food and relief. In the meantime tell your Master and brothers what they do not know.»

And He sits on His little bed with Philip and Nathanael beside Him, while Peter and Simon sit on the next bed, opposite Jesus, knees to knees.

«Will you speak, Philip? I have already spoken. And you have been more just than I have, all this time...»

«Oh! Bartholomew! Just! I had only understood that if the Master had not taken us with Him, it was not because of inconstancy or animosity towards us... And I endeavoured to set your mind at peace... preventing you from thinking of things as later you would have repented of your thoughts and would have felt remorse. I had one remorse only... for preventing you from disobeying the Master when you wanted to follow Simon of Jonah who was going to Nazareth to get Marjiam... Later... I saw both your body and soul suffer so much, that I said: "It would have been better if I had let him go! The Master would have forgiven his disobedience and Bartholomew would not be poisoning his soul with such ideas"... But... see? If you had gone, you would never have had the key to the mystery... and perhaps your suspicion of the Master's inconstancy would never have been dispelled. Instead...»

«Yes. Thus... I understood. Master, Simon of Jonah and Simon Zealot, whom I harassed with questions to find out many things and have confirmation of things I already knew, said only this to me: “The Master has suffered very much, so much that He has grown thin and old. And the whole of Israel, and first of all we ourselves, are to be blamed for that. He loves and forgives us. But He does not want to speak of the past. So we advise you not to ask questions and not to say anything... But I want to say something. I will not ask any question. But I must speak, so that You may know. Because nothing of what is in the soul of Your apostle is to be concealed from You. One day – Simon and the others had already gone away a few days before – Michael of Cana came to me. He is a distant relation, a good friend and an old schoolmate... I am sure that he came in good faith. Because he is fond of me. But he who sent him is not in good faith. He wanted to know why I had remained at home... while the others had left. And he said to me: “So it is true? You parted from them because, as a good Israelite, you could not approve of certain things. And the others, beginning with Jesus of Nazareth, let you go quite willingly, because they know that you would not help them, not even as a silent accomplice. You are doing the right thing! I see that you are still the man of good old days. I thought you had become corrupt by denying Israel. You are doing the right thing for your spirit, your own welfare and for your relatives. Because the Sanhedrin will not forget what is happening, and those who are taking part in it will be persecuted.” I said to him: “What are you talking about? I told you that I was instructed to stay at home both because of the season and to send eventual pilgrims to Nazareth or inform them to wait for the Master at Capernaum by the end of Shebat, and you are talking about parting, complicity, persecutions? What do you mean?... Philip, that is what I said, did I not?»

Philip nods assent. Bartholomew resumes: «Michael then told me that it was a known fact that You were rebelling against the advice and order of the members of the Sanhedrin by keeping John of Endor and a Greek woman with You... My Lord, I am grieving You, am I not? But I must tell You. I ask You: is it true that they were at Nazareth?»

«Yes, it is.»

«Is it true that they left with You?»

«Yes, it is.»

«Philip: Michael was right! But how did he know?»

«That's no problem! It's those snakes who stopped me and Simon, and goodness knows how many more. The usual vipers» says Peter impulsively.

Jesus instead asks quietly: «Did he not tell you anything else? Be sincere with your Master, to the very end.»

«Nothing else. He wanted to know from me... And I told Michael a lie. I said: “I will be staying at home until Passover.” I was afraid he might follow me, or... I don't know... I was afraid I might injure You... Then I understood why You had left me... You realised that I was still too much an Israelite...» Bartholomew begins to weep again... «... and You had doubts about me...»

«No. Absolutely not. It was not necessary for you to be with your companions at that particular moment, whereas you were necessary, and you can see that yourself, at Bethsaida. Each man has his mission; every age has its work...»

«No. Don't put me aside because of work, Lord. Don't worry about that... You are good. But I want to be with You. It is a punishment to be away from You... And I, although silly and incapable... I could have at least comforted You, if I could have done nothing else. I have understood... You sent these ones here away with those two. Don't tell me. I don't want to know. But I feel that it is so, and I say so. Well, in that case, I could and should have been with You. But You did not take me to punish me for being so reluctant to become “new”. But I swear it to You, Master, what I suffered has changed me and never again will You see the old Nathanael in me.»

«So you can see that our suffering has come to a joyful end for everybody. And now we shall slowly go to meet Thomas and Judas, without waiting for them to go to the appointed place. And we shall set out again with them... There is so much to be done!... We will set off tomorrow. Quick.»

«And You will be doing the right thing. Because the weather is changing in the north. A calamity for cultivations...» says Philip.

«Yes! The recent hailstorms have destroyed strips of the country. You should see them, Lord! Certain places seem to have been burned out by fire. And the strange thing is that the disaster happened as I said: in strips» says Peter.

«While you were away, we had many hailstorms. One day, about the middle of Tebeth, it looked like a real scourge. I am told that down in the plain they have to sow all over again. It was warmer previously. But since then sunshine is a pleasure. We are going backwards... What strange signs! What will they be?»

asks Philip.

«Nothing but the effect of lunations. Do not worry about it. These things should not impress you. In any case we are going towards the plain and it will be pleasant to travel. It will be cold, but not very, and in return it will be dry weather. Come with Me in the meantime. There is lovely sunshine on the terrace. We can rest up there, all together...»

332. On the Way Back to Galilee.

18th November 1945.

«And now that we have satisfied also the shepherd, what shall we do?» asks Peter, who is alone with Jesus, while the others are in a group a few metres behind them.

«We are going to the road along the coast, towards Sicaminon.»

«Are we?! I thought we were going to Capernaum...»

«It is not necessary, Simon of Jonah. Not necessary. You have had news of your wife and of the boy, and with regard to Judas... it will be easier to go and meet him.»

«Exactly, my Lord. Is he not coming by the inland road, along the river and the lake? It is the shortest and the best sheltered one...»

«But he is not coming that way. Remember that he has to watch over the disciples and they are mostly scattered on the western side in this season, which is also very cold once again.»

«All right. If You say so... I am satisfied with being with You and seeing that You are not so sad. And... I am in no hurry to meet Judas of Simon. I wish we did not meet him!... We have been so well among ourselves!...»

«Simon, Simon! Is that your brotherly charity?»

«Lord... it is my truth» says Peter frankly. And he says so with such impetuosity and expression that Jesus finds it difficult not to laugh. But how can anyone reproach such a frank and loyal man severely?

Jesus prefers to be silent, showing extreme interest in the slopes on their left, while the plain expands on their right. The other nine, in group, are following them talking, and John seems a good shepherd, as he is carrying a lamb on his shoulders, probably a present from Annas, the shepherd.

After a little while Peter asks once again: «Are we not going to Nazareth?»

«We shall certainly go. My Mother will be pleased to hear of the journey of John and Syntyche.»

«And to see You!»

«And to see Me.»

«Will they have left at least Her in peace?»

«We shall find out.»

«But why are they so ruthless? There are so many people like John even in Judaea, and yet... Nay, to spite Rome, they protect them and hide them...»

«You must convince yourself that they do it, not because of John, but because he is a witness for the prosecution against Me.»

«But they will never find him now! You organised everything very well... You sent us all alone... by sea... in a little boat for several miles, and later, on the other side of the frontier, by ship... Oh! all well organised! I really hope that they will be disappointed.»

«They will be.»

«I am anxious to see Judas of Kerioth, to practise a little astrology on him, like a sky swept by winds and full of signs, to see whether...»

«Now, that is enough!»

«You are right. It's a fixed idea I have in here» and he strikes his forehead.

Jesus, to divert his attention, calls all the others and points out to them the strange destruction worked by hail and cold that took place when people would presume that the risk was over for that year... Some say one thing, some another, but they are inclined to consider it a divine punishment for insolent Palestine that will not accept the Lord. And the more learned among them cite similar events, mentioned by ancient stories, while the younger and less educated ones listen with great astonishment and attention.

Jesus shakes His head. «It is the effect of the moon and of remote winds. I have already told you. In the hyperborean countries a phenomenon has taken place and whole regions are suffering from its consequences.»

«But why, then, some fields are beautiful?»

«Hail does that.»

«But could it not be a punishment for the most wicked ones?»

«It could be. But it is not. It would be dreadful if it were...»

«Almost all our Fatherland would become arid and desolate, would it not, Lord?» says Andrew.

«But in the prophecies it is stated, through symbols, that evil will befall those who do not accept the Messiah. Can the Prophets possibly tell lies?»

«No, Bartholomew. And what was said, will happen. But the Most High is so infinitely good, that He wants much more than what is happening at present, to punish people. You must be good, too, and not always wish punishment for those whose hearts and minds are hardened. You must wish them conversion, not punishment. John, hand the lamb to one of your companions and come and look at the sea from the top of those dunes. I am coming, too.»

In fact they are on a road very close to the sea, and it is separated from it only by a large strip of undulating dunes, on which some thin palm-trees are swaying, or ruffled tamarisks, mastic trees and other sand plants grow.

Jesus goes with John. But who leaves Him? Nobody. And soon they are all up there, in the pleasant beautiful sunshine, facing the clear charming sea...

The town of Ptolemais is very near with its white houses. «Are we entering it?» asks Judas of Alphaeus.

«It is not necessary. We will stop and eat at the first houses. I want to be at Sicaminon by evening. We may find Isaac there.»

«How much good he is doing, eh? Did You hear Abel, John and Joseph?»

«Yes. But all the disciples are very active. I bless My Father, day and night, for that. You all... My joy, My peace, My security...» and He looks at them with so much love that tears come to the eyes of the ten apostles...

And with such loving look my vision ends.

333. Meeting Judas Iscariot and Thomas.

19th November 1945.

Although the sun is shining in the clear sky, it is bitter cold in the Kishon valley, swept by an icy wind blowing across the northern hills and destroying the tender plants, which shiver and crumple up, nipped as they are, destined to die with their new verdant foliage.

«Is this cold going to last long?» asks Matthew enveloping himself in his heavy mantle, through which only a tiny part of his face can be seen, that is his nose and eyes.

Bartholomew replies in a voice stifled by his large mantle that covers his mouth: «Perhaps until the end of this lunation.»

«In that case, we are in for it! But never mind! Fortunately we shall be staying in hospitable houses in Nazareth... And in the meantime it will be over.»

«Yes, Matthew. As far as I am concerned, it is already over, now that I see that Jesus is not so depressed. Don't you think that He is more cheerful?» asks Andrew.

«He is. But I... well, it seems impossible to me that He got so run down just because of what we know. Has there really been nothing else, as far as you know?» asks Philip.

«No. Nothing. On the contrary I can tell you that at the Syro-Phoenician border the believers there made Him very happy and He worked those miracles about which we told you» replies James of Alphaeus assuring him.

«He has been very much with Simon of Jonah these last days. And Simon has changed a lot... Of course, you have all changed. I don't know... You seem to be... more austere, I would say» says Philip.

«That is only your impression!... In actual fact we are what we were. Certainly, it was not pleasant to see the Master so depressed for so many reasons, and hear how fierce they are against Him... But we will defend Him. Oh! They will not do Him any harm if we are with Him. Last night, after I heard what Hermas was

saying, and he is serious and reliable, I said to Him: “You must no longer remain alone. You now have disciples who, as You can see, are active and are doing well, and are continuously increasing. So we will stay with You. I do not mean that You will have to do everything. It is time for You to cheer up, my dear brother. You will stay with us, among us, like Moses on the mountain, and we will fight for You, and will be ready, if necessary, to defend You also physically. What happened to John the Baptist must not happen to You.” Because, after all, if the disciples of the Baptist had not been reduced to two or three faint-hearted ones, he would not have been caught. And we are twelve and I want to persuade some of the most faithful and vigorous disciples to join us or, at least, to be near us. For instance, those who were with John at Machaerus. They are brave and faithful men: John, Matthias and also Joseph. Do you know that he is a promising young man?» says Thaddeus.

«Yes. Isaac is an angel, but his strength is entirely spiritual. Joseph is strong also physically. He is almost our age.»

«And he learns quickly. Did you hear what Hermas said? “If he had studied he would be a rabbi besides being a just man.” And Hermas knows what he is talking about.»

«I, however... would keep close to us also Stephen and Hermas, and John, the priest. Because of their knowledge of the Law and of the Temple. Do you know what their presence means for scribes and Pharisees? A check, a restraint... And for people in doubt it means: “Also the best people in Israel are with the Rabbi as His pupils and servants!”» says James of Alphaeus.

«You are right. Let us tell the Master. You heard what He said yesterday: “You must obey, but it is also your duty to open your minds to Me and say what you think is right, so that you may learn how to instruct people in future. And, if I see that what you say is just, I will accept your ideas”» says the Zealot.

«Perhaps He does that to show that He loves us, seeing that we are all more or less convinced that we are the cause of His suffering» remarks Bartholomew.

«Or He is really tired of having to see to everything and of being the only one who takes decisions and responsibility. Perhaps He also realises that His perfect holiness is... I would say almost an imperfection, considering what is in front of Him: the world that is not holy. We are not perfect saints. Just not as bad rascals as other people... and therefore more able to reply to those who are just like us» says Simon Zealot.

«And to know them, you should say!» adds Matthew.

«Oh! as far as that is concerned, I am sure that He knows them, too. Nay, He knows them better than we do, because He can read the hearts of people. I am as certain as I am sure that I am alive» says James of Zebedee.

«Well, then, why at times does He behave as He does, exposing Himself to trouble and danger?» asks Andrew desolately.

«Who knows? I cannot tell you» says Thaddeus shrugging his shoulders. And the others agree with him.

John is silent. His brother teases him: «Since you always know everything about Jesus – at times you seem to be very close to each other – has He ever told you why He behaves like that?»

«Yes. I asked Him also recently. He always replied: “Because I must. *I must act as if the whole world were of ignorant but good people. I teach everybody the same doctrine and thus the children of Truth will be separated from those of Falsehood.*” He also said to me: “See, John? This is like a first judgement, not a universal or collective one, but a single judgement. According to their action of faith, charity and justice, lambs will be separated from kids. And that will last also afterwards, when I shall no longer be here, but there will be My Church, forever and ever, until the end of the world. The first judgement of the mass of human people will take place in the world, where men act freely, in front of Good and Evil, Truth and Falsehood. As the first judgement took place in the Earthly Paradise, in front of the tree of Good and Evil, infringed by those who disobeyed God. Then at the death of each individual, the judgement already written in the book of human actions by a faultless Mind will be ratified. The Great, the Terrible Judgement will be the last one, when the mass of men will be judged again. From Adam to the last man. *They will be judged for what they freely wanted for themselves on the earth.* Now, if I should select by Myself those who deserve the Word of God, Miracle, Love and those who do not – and I could do it by divine right and ability those who are excluded, even if they were demons, on the day of their individual judgement, would shout loud: ‘Your Word is the culprit because He did not want to teach us’. But they will not be able to say that... or rather, they will say so, lying once more. And they will therefore be judged.”»

«So to refuse His doctrine is to be a reprobate?» asks Matthew.

«I don't know about that, whether all those who do not believe will be reprobates. If you remember, while speaking to Syntyche He gave us to understand that *those who act honestly in life are not reprobates, even if they believe in other religions*. But we can ask Him. Israel, which is aware of the Messiah and now believes in Him partly and badly, or rejects Him, will certainly be severely judged.»

«The Master speaks a lot to you, and you know many things which we don't» remarks his brother James.

«It's your fault and the fault of all of you. I ask Him questions with simplicity. At times I ask Him questions that must make His John appear a big fool to Him. But I do not mind. All I want is to know what He thinks and keep it within me to make it mine. You ought to do the same. But you are always afraid! Of what? Of being ignorant? Of being superficial? Of being blockheads? You should be afraid only of not being yet prepared when He goes away. He always says so... and I always repeat it to myself to be prepared for the separation... But I feel that it will be very sorrowful...»

«Don't make me think of it!» exclaims Andrew. And the others echo his words sighing.

«But when will it happen? He always says: "Soon". But that could be within a month or within years. He is so young and time flies so fast... What is the matter, brother? You have turned very pale...» Thaddeus asks James.

«Nothing! I was thinking...» replies immediately James of Alphaeus with his head lowered.

And Thaddeus bends to see his face... «You have tears in your eyes! What is the matter?...»

«Not more than you have... I was thinking of when we will be alone.»

«Oh! What is the matter with Simon of Jonah who is running ahead shouting like a merganser on a stormy day?» asks James of Zebedee, pointing to Peter who has left Jesus alone and has run away shouting words that the wind prevents his companions from hearing.

They quicken their pace and see that Peter has taken a little path coming from Sephoris, which is now close at hand (so the apostles say, asking one another whether Jesus has ordered him to go to Sephoris by that short cut). But, looking

carefully they see that Thomas and Judas are the only two travellers coming from the town towards the main road.

«Look at that! Here? Just here? Oh! What are they doing here? If they were to go anywhere, from Nazareth they were to go to Cana and then to Tiberias...» many remark.

«Perhaps they were coming here looking for disciples. That was their mission» says wise Zealot, who feels suspicion being roused in the hearts of many like an awakened snake.

«Let us quicken our pace. Jesus is alone and He seems to be waiting for us...» advises Matthew. They go and reach Jesus at the same time as Peter, Judas and Thomas.

Jesus is very pale, so much so that John asks Him: «Are You not feeling well?» Jesus smiles and makes a gesture of denial while He greets the two who have come back after such a long absence.

He embraces Thomas first; he is as prosperous and cheerful as usual, but he becomes serious when he sees the Master so changed and he politely asks: «Have You been ill?»

«No, Tom. I have not. And have you always been well and happy?»

«Yes, I have, Lord. I have always been well and always happy. I missed You, had You been there my heart would have been utterly happy. My father and mother are grateful to You for sending me home for a little while. My father was not very well, so I worked for him. I went to my twin sister's and saw my little nephew and I had him named as you suggested. Then Judas came and he made me go round like a little dove in love, up and down, wherever there were disciples. He had already gone round very much on his own. But he will tell You now, as he worked for ten and deserves to be listened to by You.»

Jesus lets him go and it is now Judas' turn, who has been waiting patiently and now comes forward in a frank, easy, triumphant attitude. Jesus pierces him with His sapphire eyes. But He kisses him and is kissed by him, exactly as He did with Thomas. And the words that follow are full of love: «Was your mother happy to see you, Judas? Is the holy woman well?»

«Yes, Master, and she blesses You for sending her Judas to her. She wanted to send You some gifts. But how could I bring them, since I had to go here and

there, across mountains and valleys. You need not worry, Master. All the groups of disciples whom I visited are working in a holy manner. The news is spreading out more and more. I wanted to make a personal check on the consequences with the most powerful scribes and Pharisees. I was acquainted with many and I met more now, for Your sake. I approached Sadducees and Herodians... Oh! I can assure You that my dignity was utterly crushed!... But it was for Your sake! I am prepared to do that and more. I received disdainful answers and anathemas. But I was also able to give rise to appreciative understanding in people biased against You. I do not want to be praised by You. It is enough for me that I did my duty and I thank the Eternal Father for helping me all the time. In some cases I had to make use of miracles. And I was sorry, because they deserved thunderbolts, not blessings. But You say that we must love and be patient... I behaved thus to the honour and glory of God and for Your joy. I hope that many obstacles have been removed for good, also because I guaranteed upon my honour that those two, who cast such a gloomy shadow over us, are no longer with You. Later I had a scruple about stating what I did not know for certain. So I decided to check in order to do what might be necessary, as I did not want them to find out that I had lied, which would have made those to be converted suspect me forever. Imagine! I approached also Annas and Caiaphas!... Oh! They wanted to annihilate me with their reproaches... But I was so humble and persuasive, that they ended up by saying to me: “Well, if the situation is really like that... We were told it was different. The rectors of the Sanhedrin, who were in a position to know about it, told us the opposite and...”

«You are not going to say that Joseph and Nicodemus are liars» interrupts the Zealot, who has controlled himself so far, but can no longer do so, and is livid with his effort.

«Who said so? On the contrary, Joseph saw me when I was coming out of Annas' house and he said to me: “Why are you so upset?” I told him everything, and how, following his advice and Nicodemus', You, Master, had sent away the galley-slave and the Greek woman. Because You have sent them away, have You not?» says Judas staring at Jesus with his jet eyes, which shine to the point of being phosphorescent. He seems to be wishing to pierce Jesus with his eyes in order to read what He has done.

Jesus, Who is still in front of him and very close, says calmly: «Please go on, I am very interested in what you are saying. It is an accurate report and can be very useful.»

«Ah! so I was saying that Annas and Caiaphas have changed their minds. That means a lot to us, does it not? And then!... Oh! I will make you laugh now! Do you know that I was caught in the middle by rabbis who examined me, like a minor who becomes of age? And what an examination! Well. I convinced them and they let me go. Then I became suspicious and I was afraid I had said something that was not true. So I decided to take Thomas and go once again where the disciples were, or where one could presume that John and the Greek woman were sheltered. I went to Lazarus, to Manaen, to Chuza's palace, to Eliza in Bethzur, to Johanna's garden in Bether, to Gethsemane, to Solomon's little house beyond the Jordan, to the Clear Water, to Nicodemus, to Joseph...»

«But had you not seen him?»

«Yes. And he had assured me that he had not seen those two any more. But You know... I wanted to be sure... In short: I inspected every place where I expected him to be... And do not think that I suffered not finding him. You would do me wrong. Every time – and Thomas can confirm this – every time I came out of a place without finding him and without any trace of him, I would say: “Praised be the Lord!”, and I said: “O Eternal Father, grant that I may never find him!” I did! It was the desire of my soul... Esdraelon was the last place... Ah! By the way! Ishmael ben Fabi, who is in his country house at Megiddo, wishes to have You as his guest... But if I were You, I would not go...»

«Why not? I will certainly go. I am anxious to see him, too. Nay, we will go there at once. Instead of going to Sephoris, we will go to Esdraelon, then to Megiddo the day after tomorrow, which is the Sabbath eve, and from there to Ishmael's house.»

«No, Lord! Why? Do You think that he is fond of You?»

«But if you have approached him and changed him in My favour, why do you not want Me to go?»

«I did not approach him... He was in the fields and he recognised me. But I – is that true, Thomas? – I wanted to run away when I saw him. But I could not, because he called me by my name. I can but advise You to never go to any Pharisee, or scribe or the like. It will do You no good. Let us be among ourselves, all alone, with the people, and nothing else. Including Lazarus, Nicodemus and Joseph... It will be a sacrifice... But it is better to make it, to avoid jealousies, hatred... and laying ourselves open to censure... When at table You speak... and they work underhand at Your words. But let us go back to

John... I was now going to Sicaminon, although Isaac, whom I met at the border of Samaria, swore to me that he had not seen him since October.»

«And Isaac swore the truth. But what you are advising, concerning contacts with scribes and Pharisees, clashes with what you said before. You defended Me... That is what you did, is it not? You said: "I have demolished many prejudices against You." You said so, did you not?»

«Yes, Master, I did.»

«Well, then, why can I not complete My defence Myself? So we will go to Ishmael. And you will now go back and warn him. Andrew, Simon Zealot and Bartholomew will come with you. We shall go to the peasants and rest with them. As far as Sicaminon is concerned, we have just come from there. And we were eleven. We confirm to you that John is not there. Neither is he at Capernaum or Bethsaida, at Tiberias, Magdala, Nazareth, Korazim, Bethlehem in Galilee, and so forth for all the other places you perhaps wished to call at... to make sure that John is not among disciples or in friendly houses.»

Jesus speaks calmly, in a natural tone... And yet there must be something in Him that upsets Judas, who changes colour for a moment. Jesus embraces him as if He wanted to kiss him... And while His cheek is against Judas', He whispers to him in a low voice: «You wretch! What have you done with your soul?»

«Master... I...»

«Go away! You stink of hell more than Satan himself! Be quiet!... And repent, if you can.»

Judas... I would have run away at full speed. Not he. He impudently says in a loud voice: «Thank You, Master. But I beg You, before I go, may I speak to You privately for a moment?»

All the others move a good distance away. «Why, Lord, did You say those words to me? You grieved me...»

«Because it is the truth. Who deals with Satan, smells like Satan.»

«Ah! is it because of necromancy? Oh! You frightened me! That was a joke! Nothing but the joke of a curious child. And it helped me to approach some Sadducees and to lose all desire to meet them again. So You can see that You can absolve me without any worry. They are things of no importance when one has Your power. You were right. Come on, Master! My fault is a very light

one!... Great is Your wisdom. But who told You?»

Jesus looks at him severely but does not reply.

«But have You really seen the sin in my heart?» asks Judas somewhat frightened.

«And it disgusted Me. Go away! And say no more.» And He turns His back to him and goes back to the disciples, whom He orders to change route, after saying goodbye to Bartholomew, Simon and Andrew, who join Judas and go away quickly, while those who have remained walk away slowly, unaware of the truth, which is known to Jesus only.

They are so unaware that they praise Judas for his activity and sagacity. And honest Peter sincerely accuses himself of his heart's rash judgement on his fellow-disciple...

Jesus smiles... a mild, rather tired smile, as if He were abstracted and could just hear the chattering of His companions, who know of events only what their human nature allows them to know.

334. Ishmael Ben Fabi. The Parable of the Banquet.

11th September 1944.

I see Jesus walk fast along a main road, which the cold wind of a winter morning sweeps and hardens. The fields on both sides of the road are covered with a thin green veil of corn, which has just begun to grow and is a promise of future bread, although a promise that is even difficult to imagine. There are drills in the shade, which are still devoid of that blessed green down, and only those in the more sunny places have the light green veil that is so joyous as it announces the oncoming springtime. Fruit-trees are still bare, none of the dark branches have yet put forth buds. Only olive-trees have their everlasting green-grey foliage, which is as sad in the August sunshine as it is in the first light of this winter morning. Also the thick leaves of cacti are green, a mellow green of freshly painted ceramic.

As usual, Jesus is walking two or three steps ahead of His disciples. They are all

enveloped in their woollen mantles. At a certain point Jesus stops and turning round He asks the disciples: «Are you familiar with the road?»

«This is the road, but we do not know where the house is, because it is farther inland... Perhaps it is over there, where those olive-trees are...»

«No. It must be down there, at the bottom, where those big bare trees are...»

«There should be a road for carts...»

In short: they do not know anything precisely. There are no people to be seen on the road or in the fields. They proceed at random, looking for the road.

They find a little house of poor people, with two or three little fields around it. A little girl is drawing water from a well.

«Peace to you, little girl» says Jesus stopping at the hedge where there is a passage way.

«Peace to You. What do You want?»

«Some information. Where is the house of Ishmael, the Pharisee?»

«You are on the wrong road, Lord. You must go back to the crossroads and take the road that goes in the direction where the sun sets. But it is a long way, a very long one, because You have to go back to the cross-roads and then walk a good distance. Have You had anything to eat? It is cold and one feels the cold more on an empty stomach. Come in, if You wish. We are poor. But You are not rich either. You can make the best of it. Come.» And in her shrill voice she shouts: «Mother!»

A woman about thirty-five forty years old comes to the door. Her face is honest but rather sad. She is holding in her arms a half-naked child about three years old.

«Come in. The fire is lit. I will give You bread and milk.»

«I am not alone. I have these friends with Me.»

«Let them all come in and may the blessing of God come with the pilgrims to whom I am giving hospitality.»

They enter a low dark kitchen that is made cheerful by a blazing fire. They sit here and there on rustic chests.

«I will have something ready in a moment... It is still early... I have not tidied anything up yet... Excuse me.»

«Are you alone?» It is Jesus who asks.

«I am married and I have seven children. The first two are still at the market in Nain. They have to go because their father is not well. It's a very sad situation... The girls help me. This is the last one. But I have another one just a little older.»

The little one, who is now wearing his little tunic, runs barefooted towards Jesus and looks at Him inquisitively. Jesus smiles at him. They have made friends.

«Who are You?» asks the boy confidently.

«I am Jesus.»

The woman turns round looking at Him attentively. She stops between the fireplace and the table, with a loaf of bread in her hands. She opens her mouth to speak, but does not say anything.

The boy continues: «Where are You going?»

«Along the roads of the world.»

«What for?»

«To bless good children and their homes where people are faithful to the Law.»

The woman makes a gesture. Then she nods to Judas Iscariot who is closest to her. He bends towards the woman who asks: «But who is your friend?»

And Judas replies conceitedly (one would think that the Messiah is what He is, thanks to Judas' kindness): «He is the Rabbi of Galilee: Jesus of Nazareth. Don't you know, woman?»

«This is a secluded road and I have so many sorrows!... But... could I speak to Him about them?»

«You can» replies Judas condescendingly. He seems an important person of the world granting an audience.

Jesus is still speaking to the boy who asks Him whether He has any children.

While the girl seen at the well and another older one bring milk and bowls, the woman approaches Jesus. She remains for a moment in suspense, then she stifles a cry: «Jesus: have mercy on my husband!»

Jesus stands up. He dominates her with His height, but looks at her so kindly that she plucks up courage again. «What do you want Me to do?»

«He is very ill. He is swollen like a wineskin and he cannot bend to work. He cannot rest because he chokes and tosses about... And we still have little children...»

«Do you want Me to cure him? But why do you want that of Me?»

«Because You are You. I did not know You, but I heard people speak of You. My good luck has brought You to my house after I looked for You three times at Nain and Cana. My husband was with me twice. He was looking for You, although travelling by cart makes him suffer so much... Even now he has gone with his brother... We were told that the Rabbi, after leaving Tiberias, was going towards Caesarea Philippi. He has gone there waiting for You...»

«I did not go to Caesarea. I am going to see Ishmael, the Pharisee and then I shall go towards the Jordan...»

«What? You, a good man, are going to Ishmael?»

«Yes, I am. Why?»

«Because... because... Lord, I know that You say that we must not judge, that we must forgive and love one another. I have never seen You before. But I have tried to learn as much as I could about You, and I have prayed the Eternal Father to grant me to hear You at least once. I do not want to do anything which may displease You... But how can one not judge Ishmael and how can one love him? I have nothing in common with him and therefore I have nothing to forgive him. We just shake off the insolent words he says to us when he meets our poverty on his way, with the same patience with which we shake off the dust and mud when he splashes us passing by in his fast coaches. But it is too difficult to love him and not judge him... He is so bad!»

«Is he so bad? To whom?»

«To everybody. He oppresses his servants, he lends on usury and exacts pitilessly. He loves but himself. He is the most cruel man in the countryside. He is not worth it, Lord.»

«I know. You have spoken the truth.»

«And You are going there?»

«He invited Me.»

«Do not trust him, Lord. He did not do it out of love. He is not capable of loving. And You... You cannot love him.»

«I love also sinners, woman. I came to save those who are lost...»

«But You will not save him. Oh! Forgive me for judging! You know... Everything You do is good! Forgive my silly tongue and do not punish me.»

«I will not punish you. But do not do it again. Love also wicked people. Not because of their wickedness, but because it is through love that mercy is granted to them, that they may convert. You are good and willing to become even better. You love the Truth and the Truth speaking to you says that He loves you because you are pitiful to guests and pilgrims according to the Law and you have brought up your children accordingly. God will be your reward. I must go to Ishmael who invited Me to show Me to many of his friends who want to meet Me. I cannot wait any longer for your husband, who, incidentally, is on his way back home. But tell him to be patient for another little while and to come immediately to Ishmael's house. And I ask you to come as well. I will cure him.»

«Oh! Lord!...» the woman is on her knees at Jesus' feet and looks at Him smiling and weeping. She then says: «But this is the Sabbath!...»

«I know. I need it to be the Sabbath to say something to Ishmael concerning it. Everything I do, I do for a definite unerring purpose. You must all be aware of that, including you, My friends, who are afraid and would like Me to follow a behaviour according to human convenience to avoid eventual damage. You are led by love. I know. But you must love in a better way those whom you love. Do not postpone the interests of God to the interests of the person you love. Woman, I must go now, I will wait for you. May peace last forever in this house in which God and His Law are loved, marriage is respected, children are brought up holily, the neighbour is loved and the Truth sought. Goodbye.»

Jesus lays His hand on the heads of the woman and of the two young girls, He then bends to kiss the little ones and goes out.

Winter sunshine now mitigates the very cold air. A boy about fifteen years old is waiting with a rustic ramshackle cart.

«This is all I have. But it will be quicker and more comfortable for You.»

«No, woman. Keep the horse fresh to come to Ishmael's house. Just show Me

the shortest road.»

The boy walks at His side and through fields and meadows they go towards an undulating ground, beyond which there is a well cultivated dell a few acres wide, in the middle of which there is a beautiful large low house, surrounded by a well-kept garden.

«That is the house, Lord» says the boy. «If You no longer need me, I will go back home to help my mother.»

«Go and be always a good son. God is with you.»

... Jesus enters Ishmael's magnificent country house. Many servants rush to meet the Guest, Who is certainly expected. Some go and inform the landlord, who comes out to meet Jesus bowing deeply.

«You are welcome to my house, Master!»

«Peace to you, Ishmael Ben Fabi. You wanted to see Me. Here I am. Why did you want Me?»

«To have the honour of having You and to introduce You to my friends. I want them to be Your friends as well. As I want You to be my friend.»

«I am the friend of everybody, Ishmael.»

«I know. But, You know! It is wise to have friends high up. And I and my friends are such. Forgive me for telling You, but You neglect too much those who can help You...»

«And are you one of those? Why?»

«I am. Why? Because I admire You and I want You to be my friend.»

«Friend! But do you know, Ishmael, the meaning I attach to that word? *Friend to many people means acquaintance, to some it means accomplice, to some servant. To Me it means: faithful to the Word of the Father. Who is not such, cannot be My friend, neither can I be his.*»

«I want Your friendship, Master, just because I want to be faithful. Do You not believe me? Look: there is Eleazar coming. Ask him how I defended You with the Elders. Hallo, Eleazar. Come here, the Rabbi wants to ask you something.»

They exchange greetings with low bows and inquisitive looks.

«Will you repeat, Eleazar, what I said for the Master the last time we met?»

«Oh! A true praise! An impassioned speech! Ishmael spoke so well of You, Master, as of the greatest Prophet who ever came to the people of Israel, that I have longed to hear You ever since. I remember that he said that no one had wiser words than Yours, or greater charm, and that if You can draw Your sword as well as You can speak, there will be no greater king than You in Israel.»

«My Kingdom!... That Kingdom, Eleazar, is not a human one.»

«But the King of Israel!»

«Open your minds to understand the meaning of the arcane words. The Kingdom of the King of kings will come. But not according to human standards. Not with regard to what perishes; but with regard to what is eternal. You do not enter it along a flowery road of triumph or on a carpet made purple by enemy blood; *but climbing a steep path of sacrifices and a mild staircase of forgiveness and love. Our victories over ourselves will give us that Kingdom.* And God grant that most people in Israel may understand Me. But it will not be so. You are thinking of what does not exist. A sceptre will be in My hand, and it will be put there by the people of Israel. A regal eternal sceptre. No king will ever be able to remove My House. But many people in Israel will not be able to look at it without shuddering with horror, because it will have a dreadful name for them.»

«Do You think that we are not capable of following You?»

«If you wanted, you could. But you do not want. Why do you not want? You are elderly now. Your age should make you understand and be just, also for your own sake. Young people... may make mistakes and then repent. But you! Death is always close to elderly people. Eleazar, you are less entangled in the theories of many people of your rank. Open your heart to the Light...»

Ishmael comes back with five more pompous Pharisees: «Come in» says the landlord. They leave the hall, which is well furnished with seats and carpets, and they enter a room into which amphorae are brought for ablutions. They then pass into the dining room, in which everything has been magnificently arranged.

«Jesus beside me. Between me and Eleazar» orders the landlord. And Jesus, Who had remained at the end of the room, near the rather intimidated and neglected disciples, has to sit at the place of honour.

The banquet begins with numerous dishes of roast meat and fish.

Wines and syrups, I think, or at least water sweetened with honey, are served several times.

Everybody tries to make Jesus speak. A shaky old man asks in a decrepit clucking voice: «Is it true what people say, that You are going to change the Law?»

«I will not change one iota of the Law. On the contrary (and Jesus emphasizes His words) I have come to complete it again, as it was given to Moses.»

«Do You mean that it was modified?»

«No, never. It only had the same fate as all sublime things entrusted to man.»

«What do You mean? Explain Yourself.»

«I mean that man, through ancient pride or the ancient incentive of treble lust, wanted to touch up the straightforward word and the result was something that oppresses faithful believers, whilst, with regard to those who touched it up, it is nothing but a pile of sentences... to be left to other people.»

«But, Master! Our rabbis...»

«That is an accusation!»

«Don't disappoint our desire to be of assistance to You!...»

«Hey! They are quite right in saying that You are a rebel!»

«Silence! Jesus is my guest. Let Him speak freely.»

«Our rabbis began their work with the holy purpose of making the application of the Law easier. God Himself began that school when He added detailed explanations to the words of the Ten Commandments. So that man could not find the excuse that he had not understood. The work therefore of those teachers who break into crumbs for the children of God the bread given by God for their souls, is holy work. But it is holy when it pursues a righteous aim. Which was not always the case. And least of all it is nowadays. But why do you want Me to speak, when you take offence if I enumerate the faults of the mighty ones?»

«Faults! Have we nothing but faults?»

«I wish you had nothing but merits!»

«But we do not have them. That is what You think and what Your eyes say. Jesus, one does not make powerful friends by criticising them. You will not reign. You are not acquainted with that art.»

«I do not ask to reign according to your ideas, neither do I beg for friendship. I want love. Honest holy love. A love that extends from Me to those whom I love and is displayed by making use of what I preach to use: mercy.»

«Since I heard You, I have not lent on usury any more» says one.

«And God will reward you for that.»

«God is my witness that I have not thrashed my servants any more, although they deserve to be lashed, after I heard one of Your parables» says another one.

«And what about me? I left over ten bushels of barley in the fields for the poor!» states a third one.

The Pharisees praise themselves excellently.

Ishmael has not spoken. Jesus asks him: «And what about you, Ishmael?»

«Oh! I! I have always used mercy. I have but to continue as I behaved in the past.»

«Good for you! If it is really so, you are really the man who feels no remorse.»

«No! I really do not.»

Jesus' sapphire glance pierces him.

Eleazar says touching His arm: «Master, listen to me. I have a special case to submit to You. I recently bought a property of a poor wretch who ruined himself for a woman. He sold it to me, without telling me that there was an old servant, his nurse, in it. She is now blind and feeble-minded. The vendor does not want her. I... would not like to have her either. But to throw her out... What would You do, Master?»

«What would you do if you were to advise somebody else?»

«I would say: "Keep her. A piece of bread will not be your ruin."»

«Why would you say so?»

«Well!... because I think that is what I would do and what I would like to be done to me...»

«You are very close to Justice, Eleazar. Do as you would advise and the God of Jacob will always be with you.»

«Thank You, Master.»

The others are grumbling among themselves.

«What have you to grumble about?» asks Jesus. «Is what I said not just? And has Eleazar not spoken justly? Ishmael, since you have always been merciful, defend your guests.»

«Master, You are right but... if one always did that!... One would become the victim of other people.»

«Whereas, according to you, it is better if other people become our victims, is that right?»

«I don't mean that. But there are cases...»

«The Law says that we must be merciful...»

«Yes, to a poor brother, to a stranger, a pilgrim, a widow, to an orphan. But this old woman, who turned up in Eleazar's property, is not his sister, a pilgrim, a stranger, an orphan or a widow. She is nothing to him. She is just an old piece of furniture, which does not belong to him, and was forgotten by her true master in the sold property. Eleazar, therefore, could throw her out without any scruple at all. He would not be responsible for the death of the old woman. Her true master would...»

«... and he cannot keep her any longer because he is poor himself and thus he is free from obligations as well. So if the old woman dies of starvation, it is her own fault. Is it not so?»

«It is, Master. It is the destiny of those who... are no longer of any use. Sick, old, unfit people are condemned to misery, to begging. And death is the best thing for them... It has always been like that since the beginning of the world, and it will ever be so...»

«Jesus, have mercy on me!» A moaning voice is heard through the closed windows; the room is in fact closed and the chandeliers are lit. Perhaps because it is cold.

«Who is calling Me?»

«A nuisance of a fellow. I will have him driven away. Or a beggar. I will have a piece of bread given to him.»

«Jesus, I am ill. Save me!»

«As I said, it is a pestering fellow. I will punish the servant for letting him in.» And Ishmael stands up.

But Jesus Who is at least twenty years younger than he is and head and shoulders over him, makes him sit down again, laying a hand on his shoulders and ordering: «Stay, Ishmael. I want to see the man who is looking for Me. Let him in.»

A dark-haired man comes in. He must be about forty years old. But he is as swollen as a barrel and as yellow as a lemon, his half open lips are violaceous and he is panting. The woman seen in the first part of the vision is with him. The man comes forward with difficulty because of his disease and because he is afraid. He in fact sees that he is being looked at with such evil eyes!

But Jesus has left His place and has gone towards the unhappy man taking him by the hand and leading him to the middle of the room, in the empty space of the 'U' shaped table, right under the chandelier. «What do you want from Me?»

«Master... I have sought You so much, for such a long time... I want nothing but health... for the sake of my children and of my wife... You can do everything... See in what a state I am...»

«And do you believe that I can cure you?»

«I do believe it!... Every step... every jerk is painful... and yet I have travelled for miles and miles looking for You... and I followed You also by cart, without ever reaching You... Of course I believe!... I am surprised that I have not already been cured, since my hand has been in Yours, because everything in You is holy, o Holy Man of God.»

The poor man is puffing and blowing owing to the effort of speaking so much. His wife looks at him and at Jesus and weeps.

Jesus looks at them and smiles. He then turns round and asks: «You, old scribe (He addresses the trembling old man who was the first to speak) tell Me: is it lawful to cure on a Sabbath?»

«It is not lawful to do any work on the Sabbath.»

«Not even to save a man from despair? It is not manual work.»

«The Sabbath is sacred to the Lord.»

«Which deed is more worthy of a sacred day than get a son of God to say to the Father: “I love and praise You because You have cured me”?!»

«He must do so even when he is unhappy.»

«Hananiah, do you know that your most beautiful wood is on fire this very moment and the whole slope of the Hermon is bright in the purple flames?»

The old man jumps as if he had been bitten by an asp: «Master, are You telling the truth or are You joking?»

«I am speaking the truth. I see and I know.»

«Oh! Poor me! My most beautiful wood. Thousands of shekels reduced to ashes! Damn! Cursed be the dogs that set it on fire! May their bowels burn like my wood!» The little old man is in despair.

«It is only a wood, Hananiah, and you are complaining! Why do you not praise the Lord in your misfortune? This man is not losing just wood, which will grow again, but his own life and the bread for his children, and he should praise the Lord, while you do not. Well, scribe, am I allowed to cure him on the Sabbath?»

«Cursed be You, him and the Sabbath! I have more important things to think of...» and pushing Jesus aside, Who had laid a hand on his arm, he rushes out furiously and he can be heard shouting in his clucking voice to have his cart.

«And now?» says Jesus looking around at the others. «Now, will you tell Me? Is it lawful or not?»

No reply. Eleazar lowers his head, after moving his lips, which he sets again, shocked by the cold atmosphere in the hall.

«Well, I will speak» asks Jesus. His countenance is imposing and His voice thundering as usual, when He is about to work a miracle. «I will speak. And I say: man, let it be done to you according to your faith. You are cured. Praise the Eternal God. Go in peace.»

The man remains dumbfounded. Perhaps he thought that he would become as thin as in the past all of a sudden. And he does not think that he is cured. But I wonder what he feels... He shouts with joy and throws himself at Jesus' feet and kisses them.

«Go. You may go! Be always good. Goodbye!»

And the man goes out followed by the woman, who turns round until the last moment to greet Jesus.

«But, Master... In my house... On the Sabbath...»

«You do not approve? I know. That is why I came. You are My friend? No. You are My enemy. You are neither sincere with Me nor with God.»

«Are You offending me now?»

«No. I am speaking the truth. You said that Eleazar is not obliged to keep that old woman because she does not belong to him. But you had two orphans who belonged to you. They were the children of two faithful servants of yours, who died working for you, the man with a sickle in his hand, the woman killed by too much work, because she had to serve you both for herself and for her husband, as you exacted from her, in order to keep her. In fact you said: “I made the agreement for the work of two people and if you want to stay here, I want your work and the work of your dead husband.” And she gave you that and died with the child she had conceived. Because that woman was a mother. And for her there was not even the compassion one feels for an animal about to give birth to its little one. Where are those two children now?»

«I don't know... They disappeared one day.»

«Do not tell lies now. It is enough to have been cruel. It is not necessary to add falsehood to make your Sabbaths hateful to God, even if they are free from servile work. Where are those children?»

«I do not know. Believe me.»

«I know. I found them one cold, wet, dark November evening. I found them starving and shivering, near a house, like two little dogs looking for a mouthful of bread... Cursed and expelled by a man with the entrails of a dog, but who was worse than a dog, because a dog would have felt pity for those two little orphans. But you and that man did not feel any. Their parents were no longer of any use to you, is that right? They were dead. And the dead can only weep, in their graves, hearing their unhappy children's sobs, which other people neglect. But the dead, with their souls, take their tears and the tears of their orphans to God and say: “Lord, take vengeance on our behalf because the world oppresses us when it can no longer exploit us.” The two little ones were not yet able to serve you, is that right? Perhaps the girl might have been able to glean... And you drove them away and denied them also the few things, which belonged to

their father and mother. They might have died of starvation and cold, like two dogs on a cart-road. They might have lived, becoming one a thief and the other a prostitute. Because starvation leads to sin. But what did it matter to you? A little while ago you were quoting the Law to support your theories. Well, does the Law not say: "You must not be harsh with the widow, or with the orphans, if you are harsh with them and they cry out to Me, I shall hear their cry and My anger will flare and I shall kill you with the sword, your own wives will be widows, your own children orphans"? Does the Law not state that? Well, then, why do you not keep it? And you defend Me against other people? Why, then, do you not defend My doctrine in yourself? You want to be My friend? Why, then, do you do the opposite of what I say? One of you is running at break-neck speed, tearing his hair, because of the ruin of his wood. And he does not tear it because of the ruin of his heart! And what are you waiting for to do so? "Why do you, whom destiny has placed high up, always want to consider yourselves perfect? And supposing you were perfect in something, why do you not endeavour to be so in everything? Why do you hate Me, because I open your wounds? I am the Doctor of your souls. Can a doctor cure a sore if he does not open it and clean it? Do you not know that many people, and that woman who has just gone out is one of them, deserve the first places in the banquet of God, although they apparently look miserable? *Outward appearance does not count; it is the heart and the soul that matter.* God sees you from the height of His throne. And He judges you. How many He sees who are better than you are! So listen. *As a rule, always act as follows: When you are invited to a wedding banquet, always choose the last place.* Double honour will come to you when the landlord says to you: "Come forward, my friend." Honour to your merit and your humility. Whereas... It will be a sad moment for a proud man to be shamed and hear the landlord say: "Go down there to the end, because there is someone here more worthy than you are." And do the same in the secret banquet of your souls at the wedding with God. *He who humbles himself will be exalted and he who exalts himself will be humbled.* Ishmael, do not hate Me for curing you. I do not hate you. I came to cure you. You are more seriously ill than that man. You invited Me to give prestige to yourself and satisfaction to your friends. *You often invite people, but you do it out of pride and for pleasure. Do not do that.* Do not invite rich people, relatives and friends. Open your house and your heart to the poor, to beggars, cripples, to lame people, orphans and widows. In return they will give you blessings. And God will change them into graces. And at the end... what a happy destiny for all the merciful who will be rewarded by God at the resurrection of the dead! Woe to those who cherish only hopes of profit and

later close their hearts to the brothers who can no longer serve them. Woe to them! I will revenge the forlorn.»

«Master... I... I want to please You. I will take those children again.»

«No, you will not.»

«Why?»

«Ishmael?!...»

Ishmael lowers his head. He wants to appear humble. But he is a viper deprived of its poison and does not bite because it knows it has none, but waits for the opportunity to bite...

Eleazar endeavours to restore peace saying: «Blessed are those who feast with God, in their souls and in the eternal Kingdom. But, believe me, Master. At times it is life that hinders us. Offices... occupations...»

At this point Jesus tells the parable of the wedding feast and concludes: «Offices... occupations, you said. It is true. That is why I said to you, at the beginning of this banquet, *that My Kingdom is conquered through victories over ourselves, not by means of victories in the battle field. The places at the Great Supper are for the humble-hearted, who are great through their faithful love, which takes no account of sacrifices and overcomes all difficulties to come to Me. Even one hour is sufficient to change a heart. Providing that heart wants to change.* And one word is sufficient. I have told you many. And I am looking... A holy tree is springing up in a heart. In the others, there are thorns for Me, and in the thorns there are asps and scorpions. It does not matter. I will proceed in My straight way. Let those who love Me follow Me. I go round calling... Let righteous people come to Me. I go round teaching... Let the seekers of justice approach the Fountain. With regard to the others... the Holy Father will judge. Ishmael, I say goodbye to you. Do not hate Me. Meditate. You will see that I was severe out of love, not out of hatred. Peace to this house and to those who dwell in it, peace to everybody, if you deserve peace.»

335. Jesus at Nazareth with His Cousins and with Peter and Thomas.

20th November 1945.

«You will put here the vision that you saw on 11th September 1944.»

Ishmael Ben Fabi.

Jesus is once again with His disciples on the road that from the Esdraelon plain takes one to Nazareth. They must have spent the night somewhere, because it is early morning. They walk for some time in silence. Jesus is ahead of them, alone, then He calls Peter and Simon and walks with them, finally they are all in a group until they reach a cross-roads where the Nazareth road joins the road that leads to the north.

Jesus beckons those who are speaking to be quiet and says: «We shall now part. I am going to Nazareth with My brothers, with Peter and Thomas. Under the guidance of Simon Zealot, along the Tabor and caravan road, you will go to Debaret, Tiberias, Magdala, Capernaum, and then towards Meron. You will stop at Jacob's to see whether he has been converted and you will take My blessing to Judas and Anne. You will stay in those houses where they offer you hospitality more insistently. You will stay one night only in each place, because on the Sabbath evening we will meet on the Saphet road. I will spend the Sabbath at Korazim, in the house of the widow. Call on her and tell her. In this way we will at last give peace to the soul of Judas, who will be convinced that John is not in any of those hospitable places...»

«Master! But I believe it!...»

«But it is always better to make sure, so that you will not blush before Caiaphas and Annas, as I do not blush before you or any other man when I say that John is no longer with us. I am taking Thomas to Nazareth, so that he may rest assured also with regard to that place, as he will be able to see with his own eyes...»

«But, Master... I! What do I care? I am only sorry that that man is no longer with us. He may have been what he was. But since we have known him, he has always been better than many famous Pharisees. It is enough for me to know that he did not deny You and did not grieve You and then... whether he is on the earth or in Abraham's bosom, I do not care. Believe me. If he were in my house... I would not disdain him. I hope that You do not think that in the heart of

Your Thomas there is more than a natural curiosity, but no animosity, no spur of a more or less honest investigation, no inclination to voluntary or involuntary or authorised espionage, no desire to be harmful...»

«You are offending me! You are insulting me! You are lying! You have seen that I have always acted in a holy way during this time. So why do you say that? What can you say about me? Speak up!» Judas is furious and wild.

«Be silent. Thomas will reply to Me. To Me only, as I spoke to him. I believe Thomas' words. But that is what I want, and that will be done, and none of you are entitled to reprove My conduct.»

«I am not reproaching You... But his insinuation struck me and...»

«You are twelve. Why did it strike you only, when I spoke to everybody?»

«Because I looked for John.»

Jesus says: «Also other companions of yours did so, and other disciples will do so, but none will feel offended by Thomas' words. It is not a sin to ask after a fellow disciple in an honest manner. Words like those just uttered do not hurt, when our hearts are full of love and honesty and nothing pricks them or makes them supersensible having already been bitten by remorse. Why do you want to remonstrate thus in the presence of your companions? Do you want to be suspected of sin? Wrath and pride are two bad companions, Judas. They drive one to frenzy, and a frenzied person sees what does not exist, and says what should not be said... just as greed and lust drive people to guilty actions in order to be satisfied... Get rid of such wicked servants... And in the meantime you had better know that during the many days while you were away, there has always been very good harmony among us, as well as obedience and respect. We love one another, do you understand?... Goodbye, My dear friends. Go and love one another. Is that clear to you? Love one another and bear with one another, speak little and act well. Peace be with you.»

He blesses them and while they go to the right, Jesus continues on His way with His cousins, Peter and Thomas.

They proceed in dead silence. Then Peter explodes in a thundering solitary: «Who knows!» as a consequence of I wonder what long meditation. The others look at him...

Jesus immediately wards off possible questions by saying: «Are you two happy

to come to Nazareth with Me?» and He lays His arms round the shoulders of Peter and Thomas.

«Can You doubt it?» says Peter in his exuberance.

Thomas, more calmly, with his plump face shining with joy, adds: «Do You not know that to be near Your Mother is such a joy that I cannot find words to explain it to You? Mary is my love. I am not a virgin, and I was not against having a family and I had already set my eyes on some girls, but I was uncertain as to which I should choose as my wife. But now! No... My love is Mary. The love exceeding sense. Sense dies only by thinking of Her! The love that fills the soul with delight. I compare all the good I see in women, also in the dearest ones, such as my mother and my twin sister, to what I see in Your Mother, and I say to myself: “All justice, grace and beauty is in Her. Her loving soul is a bed of heavenly flowers... Her appearance is a poem... Oh! in Israel we dare not think of angels and with fearful reverence we look at the Cherubim of the Holy of Holies!... How foolish of us! As we do not tremble ten times as much with venerable fear looking at Her! Because I am sure that in the eyes of God She exceeds all angelical beauty...»

Jesus looks at His apostle who loves His Mother so much that he seems to become almost spiritualised, as his feelings for Mary change his good-natured countenance so deeply. «Well, we shall be with Her for a few hours. We shall stay until the day after tomorrow. Then we shall go to Tiberias to see the two children and to get a boat to Capernaum.»

«And what about Bethsaida?»

«We will go there on our way back, Simon, to get Marjiam for the Passover pilgrimage.»...

... It is the evening of the same day, at Nazareth, in the peaceful little house, where Peter and Thomas are already sleeping. Mother and Son are conversing gently.

«Everything went well, Mother. And they are now in peace. Your prayers helped the pilgrims and are now soothing their grief, like dew on parched flowers.»

«I would like to soothe Yours, Son! How much You must have suffered! Look. Your temples and Your cheeks have become hollow, and a wrinkle furrows Your forehead like the cut of a sword. Who hurt You like that, My darling?»

«The grief of having to grieve, Mother.»

«Just that, My Jesus? Did Your disciples distress You?»

«No, Mother. They have been as good as saints.»

«Those who were with You... But I mean: everyone...»

«You see that I brought Thomas here to reward him, and I would have liked to bring also those who did not come here the last time. But I had to send them elsewhere, ahead...»

«And Judas of Kerioth?»

«Judas is with them.»

Mary embraces Her Son, and reclines Her head on His shoulder, weeping.

«Why are You weeping, Mother?» asks Jesus caressing Her hair.

Mary is silent and weeps. Only after a third question, She whispers: «Because I am terrified... I would like him to leave You... It is a sin, is it not, to wish that? But I am so much afraid of him, for You...»

«Things would change only if he disappeared dying... But why should he die?»

«I am not so bad as to wish that... He has a mother as well! And a soul... A soul, which may still be saved. But... oh! Son! Would death perhaps not be a good thing for him?»

Jesus sighs and whispers: «*Death would be a good thing for many people...*» He then asks in a loud voice: «Have You heard of old Johanna? What about her fields?...»

«I went to see her with Mary of Alphaeus and Salome of Simon after the hailstorms. But as her corn had been sown late, it had not yet come up and so it suffered no damage. Mary went back to see her three days ago. She says the fields are like carpets. The nicest fields in the district. Rachel is well and the old woman is happy. Mary of Alphaeus also is happy now that Simon is all in Your favour. You will certainly see him tomorrow. He comes here every day. He had just gone away today when You arrived. You know? No one noticed anything. They would have spoken if they had noticed that they were here. But if You are not really tired, tell Me all about their journey...»

And Jesus tells His Mother everything, except His suffering in the cave at

Jiphthahel.

336. The Crippled Woman of Korazim.

21st November 1945.

Jesus is in the synagogue in Korazim which is slowly becoming crowded with people. The elders of the town must have insisted that Jesus should speak there on this Sabbath. I gather that by their arguing and by Jesus' replies.

«We are not more arrogant than Judaeans or the people of the Decapolis» they say «and yet You go there several times.»

«I do the same here. I have taught you both with words and works, and with silence and action.»

«But if we are duller than others, You should insist all the more...»

«All right.»

«Of course it is all right! We allow You to use our synagogue as a place where You can teach, because we think that it is right to do so. Accept, therefore, our invitation and speak.»

Jesus opens His arms, beckoning the people present to be silent, and He begins His speech giving a slow emphatic recitation in the tone of a psalm: «“Araunah replied to David: 'Let the lord my king take and offer as he likes. Here are the oxen for the holocaust, the threshing-sled and the oxen's yoke for the wood; Araunah, O king, gives all this to the king'. And he added: 'May the Lord your God accept your offering'. But the king replied and said: 'It shall not be done as you wish. No. I will pay you in money, as I will not offer the Lord my God holocausts that cost me nothing.' ”»

Jesus lowers His eyes, because He was speaking with His face turned towards the ceiling, and He stares at the head of the synagogue and the four elders who were with Him and asks: «Have you understood the meaning?»

«That is the second book of the Kings, when the holy king bought the threshing'

floor of Araunah... But we do not understand why You recited it. There is no pestilence here and no sacrifice to be offered. You are not a king... We mean: not yet.»

«I solemnly tell you that your minds are slow in understanding symbols and your faith is uncertain. If it were certain, you would see that I am already King, as I said, and if your understanding were quick, you would realise that there is a plague here that is more serious than the one that worried David. You are afflicted by the plague of unbelief, which causes you to perish.»

«Well! If we are dull and incredulous, give us intelligence and faith and explain to us what You meant.»

«I say: I do not offer forced holocausts to God, those which are offered for mean interests. I do not agree to speak, if that is granted only to Him Who has come to speak. It is My right and I assert it. Out in the sun or within closed walls, upon the mountains or down in valleys, on the seaside or sitting on the banks of the Jordan, everywhere it is My right and My duty to teach and to buy through My work the only holocausts that are pleasing to God: converted hearts made faithful by My Word. Here, you people of Korazim, have granted the Word to speak, not out of respect and faith, but because there is in your hearts a voice that torments you like a woodworm gnawing at a piece of wood: “This chilly punishment is due, to the harshness of our hearts.” And you want to make amends, *for your purses, not for your souls*. Oh! Pagan obstinate Korazim! But not everyone in Korazim is such, and I will speak to those who are not such, by means of a parable.

Listen. A silly rich man took a lump of material as fair as the finest honey to a craftsman and told him to make an ornate amphora with it.

“This material is not good to work at” said the craftsman to the rich man. “See? It is soft and resilient. How can I carve it and shape it?”

“What? It is not good? It is a valuable resin and a friend of mine has a small amphora made with it and his wine acquires an exquisite taste in it. I paid for it as dear as gold, to have a larger amphora and thus mortify my friend, who boasts of his. Make it at once. Or I will tell everyone that you are a poor craftsman.”

“But your friend's amphora must be of clear alabaster.”

“No. It is made with this material.”

“It is perhaps made of fine amber.”

“No. It is the same matter as this.”

“Let us suppose that it is made of this matter, but it must have been made solid and hard by age or by mixing it with other solidifying ingredients. Ask him, then come and let me know how it was done.”

“No. He sold me this himself and he assured me that it is to be used as it is.”

“In that case he cheated you to punish you for envying his beautiful amphora.”

“Watch what you say! Do the work or I will take your shop from you to punish you, in any case everything you possess is not worth what I paid for this wonderful resin.”

The desolate craftsman began to work. He kneaded... But the paste stuck to his hands. He tried to solidify part of it with mastic and powders... But the resin lost its golden transparency. He put it close to his blast-furnace hoping that the heat would harden it, but clasping his brow he had to take it away, because it liquefied. He had frozen snow brought from Mount Hermon and he immersed the resin into it... It hardened and was beautiful. But he could not mould it. “I will carve it with a chisel” he said. But at the first stroke with the chisel the resin broke into pieces.

The desperate craftsman decided to make a last trial, although he was already convinced that it was impossible to work on the material. He gathered all the pieces together and liquefied them in the heat of the furnace, he then froze them, but not too much, with snow and he tried to work with chisel and broad knife on the softish mass. It molded! But as soon as he removed chisel and broad knife it resumed its previous shape, just like dough rising in the kneading trough.

The man gave up. And to avoid being retaliated to and ruined by the rich man, during the night he loaded wife, children, furnishings and working tools on a cart and fled beyond the border, after leaving in the middle of his workshop, now completely empty, the fair mass of resin with a note on top of it with the words: “It cannot be worked.”

I have been sent to shape hearts according to Truth and Salvation. I have had in My hands hearts made of iron, lead, tin, alabaster, marble, silver, gold, jasper, gem. Hearts that were hard, wild, too tender, inconstant, hearts hardened by sorrows, precious hearts, hearts of all kinds. I worked at every one of them. And

I molded many according to the desire of Him Who sent Me. Some hurt Me while I was working at them, some preferred to break into pieces rather than be completed. But they will always have a recollection of Me, even if it may be a hateful one.

It is not possible to work on you. Nothing is of any avail with you: warm love, patience in teaching you, severe reproaches, chisel work. As soon as I move My hands away from you, you become again what you were. There is only one thing you should do to change: to abandon yourselves entirely to Me. But you do not do that. And you never will do it. The desolate Workman leaves you to your destiny. But, as it is fair, He does not abandon everyone in the same way. In His desolation He can still choose those who deserve His love and He comforts and blesses them. Woman, come here!» He says pointing to a woman who is near a wall and is so bent that she looks like a question mark.

The people look where Jesus is pointing, but they cannot see the woman, neither can she see Jesus and His hand from her position. Several people say to her: «Go, Martha! He is calling you.» And the poor woman plods along with her walking stick, with her head just reaching to the top of it.

She is now before Jesus, Who says to her: «I will give you a souvenir of My passing here and a reward for your silent humble faith. Be cured of your infirmity» He shouts finally, laying His hands on her shoulders.

And the woman stands up at once, as straight as a palm-tree, and raising her arms she cries: «Hosanna! He has cured me! He has seen His faithful servant and has helped her. Praise be to the Savior and King of Israel! Hosanna to the Son of David!»

The crowd sing their hosannas with the woman, who is now on her knees at Jesus' feet, kissing the hem of His tunic, while He says to her: «Go in peace and persevere in your Faith.»

The head of the synagogue, who obviously still resents the words spoken by Jesus before the parable, wants to repay reproaches with poison and shouts angrily, while the crowds open to let the cured woman pass: «There are six days to work, six days to ask and to give. So come during those six days, both to ask and to give. Come and be cured during those days, without infringing the Sabbath, you sinners and misbelievers, corrupted and corrupters of the Law!» and he tries to push everybody out of the synagogue, as if he were driving profanation out of the place of prayer.

But Jesus, Who sees that he is being helped by the four elders seen previously and by others scattered amongst the crowd, who appear to be the most scandalized and... tormented by Jesus' crime, with His arms folded on His chest, looks at him in an imposing severe attitude and shouts: «Hypocrites! Which of you on this day has not untied his ox or his donkey from the manger and taken it out for watering? And who has not taken a sheaf of grass to his sheep and milked their full udders? If you have six days to do so, why have you done it also today, just for a little milk, or for fear that your ox or your donkey might die of thirst and you might lose it? And should I not have freed this woman from her chains after Satan had held her bound for eighteen years, only because this is the Sabbath? Go. I was able to relieve her from a misfortune that she did not want. But I will never be able to relieve you from yours, because you want them, O enemies of Wisdom and Truth!»

The good people, among the many malicious ones in Korazim, approve and agree, while the others, livid with rage, run away, deserting the livid synagogue-leader.

Jesus also leaves him and goes out of the synagogue, surrounded by good people who go with Him as far as the countryside: where He blesses them for the last time. He then takes the main road with His cousins, Peter and Thomas...

337. Going towards Saphet. The Parable of the Good Farmer.

22nd November 1945.

The road to Saphet leaves the plain of Korazim and climbs a remarkable mountain range thickly covered with trees. A stream flows down the mountains towards the lake of Tiberias.

The pilgrims are waiting at a bridge for those who were sent to Merom. And they do not have to wait long. The others in fact walking fast arrive punctually at the rendezvous and meet the Master and their companions with great joy and inform them of their journey, which was blessed also with some miracles, worked in turn by «all the apostles». But Judas of Kerioth rectifies: «With the exception of me, as I was not able to do anything.» His mortification in admitting it is painful.

«We told you that it was due to the fact that we were dealing with a great sinner» replies James of Zebedee. And he explains: «You know, Master? it was Jacob and he was very ill. That is why he invokes You, because he is afraid of death and of God's judgement. But he is more avaricious than ever, now that he foresees a real disaster for his crops, which have been completely ruined by frost. He lost all his seed-corn and he cannot sow any more because he is ill and his maid-servant is not fit to plough the field, because she is worn out by fatigue and starvation, as he economises also on flour for bread, seized as he is with fear that he may be left without any food one day. We ploughed a large extension of ground for him, and perhaps we sinned, because we worked all day on Friday, also after sunset until it was dark, and even then with torches and bonfires. Philip, John and Andrew know how to do it, so do I. We worked hard... Simon, Matthew and Bartholomew followed us removing the corn that had come up and had been ruined, and Judas went in Your name to ask Judas and Anne for a little seed, promising that we would call on them today. He got it and it was chosen seed. So we said: "We will sow it tomorrow." That is why we are a little late. Because we started at the beginning of sunset. May the Eternal Father forgive us considering the reason why we sinned. Judas, in the meantime, remained near Jacob's bed, to convert him. He can speak better than we can. At least that is what Bartholomew and the Zealot said spontaneously. But Jacob turned a deaf ear to all his arguments. He wanted to be cured, because his disease costs him money and he insulted the servant calling her a sluggard. Since he said: "I will be converted if I recover", Judas imposed his hands on him to calm him down. But Jacob remained as ill as before. Judas was discouraged and told us. We tried before going to bed. But we did not obtain a miracle. Now Judas maintains that it is because he has lost Your favour, as he displeased You and is now down-hearted. But we say that it is because we had in front of us an obstinate sinner, who pretends to get everything he wants and lays down terms and gives orders to God. Who is right?»

«You seven. You have spoken the truth. What about Judas and Anne? And their fields?»

«Only slightly ruined. But they have means... and everything has already been repaired. And they are good people! Here. They have sent You this offering and this food. They hope to see You some time. It is Jacob's frame of mind that is sad. I would have liked to cure his soul, rather than his body...» says Andrew.

«And what about the other places?»

«Oh! On the way to Deberet, near the village, we cured a man – actually Matthew did – who suffered from bouts of fever. He was just coming back from a doctor who had given him up. We stopped at his house and he did not have a temperature from sunset till dawn and he said that he was feeling well and strong. Then at Tiberias Andrew cured a boatman, who had broken his shoulder falling on the bridge. He imposed his hands and the shoulder was cured. You can imagine the man! He insisted on taking us free of charge to Magdala and Capernaum and then to Bethsaida and he remained there, because there are several disciples there: Timoneus of Aera, Philip of Arbela, Ermasteus and Marcus of Josiah, one of those who were freed from the demon near Gamala. Also Joseph, the boatman, wants to become a disciple... The children, at Johanna's, are very well. They do not seem to be the same. They were playing in the garden with Johanna and Chuza...»

«I saw them. I was there, too. Go on.»

«At Magdala Bartholomew converted an evil heart and cured a wicked body. How well he spoke! He explained that disorderliness of the spirit engenders disorder in the body and that every concession to dishonesty degenerates into a loss of peace, of health and finally of the soul. When he saw that the man was repentant and convinced, he imposed his hands and the man was cured. They wanted to keep us at Magdala. But we obeyed Your instructions and the following morning we went on our way to Capernaum. There were five people there who wanted to be cured by You. And they were about to go away, as they were discouraged. We cured them. We did not see anybody, because we left at once by boat for Bethsaida, to avoid questions by Eli, Uriah and companions. At Bethsaida! But, Andrew, will you tell your brother...» concludes James of Zebedee who has spoken all the time.

«Oh! Master! Oh! Simon! If You saw Marjiam! You would not recognise him!...»

«Goodness gracious! He has not become a girl?» exclaims and asks Peter.

«On the contrary! A fine young man; he is tall and thin, as he has grown so much... He is wonderful! We could hardly recognise him. He is as tall as your wife and as me...»

«Oh! well! Neither you, nor Porphirea nor I are palm-trees! At most we could be compared to thorn-bushes...» says Peter, who, however, is overjoyed at the news that his adoptive son has grown up.

«Yes, brother. But at the recent feast of the Dedication he was still a stunted boy who hardly reached up to our shoulders. Now he is really a young man, with regard to height, voice and seriousness. He has behaved like those plants that stagnate for years then all of a sudden they become surprisingly luxuriant. Your wife has been very busy lengthening his garments and making new ones. And she makes them with wide hems and flounces at the waist, because she rightly foresees that Marjiam will grow more. And he is growing even more in wisdom. Nathanael in his wise humility did not tell You that for almost two months Bartholomew was the master of the youngest and most heroic of Your disciples, who gets up before daybreak to pasture the sheep, split wood, draw water, light the fire, sweep the floors, do the shopping, out of love for his putative mother, and then in the afternoon, until late at night, he studies and writes like a little doctor. Just imagine! He gathers all the children of Bethsaida together, and on the Sabbath he gives them short evangelical lessons. Thus the little ones, who are excluded from the synagogue, lest they should disturb the service, have their day of prayer, just like grown up people. And mothers tell me that it is beautiful to hear him speak and that children love and obey him with respect and are becoming very good. What a disciple he will be!»

«Well, well! I... am moved... My Marjiam! Even at Nazareth, eh! his heroism... for that little girl. Rachel, was it not?» Peter stops in time, blushing for fear he might have said too much.

Fortunately Jesus comes to his rescue and Judas is engrossed in thought and inattentive. Or he pretends he is. Jesus says: «Yes, Rachel. You are right. She is cured. And the fields will yield a good crop of corn. James and I have been there. The sacrifice of a young child can do so much.»

«At Bethsaida James worked a miracle for a poor cripple, and Matthew, in the street, near Jacob's house, cured a boy. And today, in the square of that village near the bridge, Philip cured a man with diseased eyes and John a boy who was possessed.»

«You have all done well. Very well. We shall now go to that village on the slopes and will stop in one of the houses to sleep.»

«And You, my dear Master, what have You done? How is Mary? And the other Mary?» asks John.

«They are well and they send you their regards. They are preparing garments and all that is necessary for the springtime pilgrimage. And they are longing to

make it in order to be with us.»

«Also Susanna, Johanna and our mother are just as anxious» says John.

Bartholomew says: «Also my wife and daughters want to come this year, after so many years, to Jerusalem. She says that it will never be as beautiful as this year... I don't know why she says so. But she maintains that she feels it in her heart.»

«In that case also mine will come. She has not told me... But what Anne does, Mary does, too» says Philip.

«And Lazarus' sisters? You have seen them...» asks Simon Zealot.

«They comply with the Master's instructions and with necessities, but they suffer... Lazarus looks very poorly, doesn't he, Judas? He has to lie down most of the time. But they are anxiously awaiting the Master» says Thomas.

«It will soon be Passover and we shall go to Lazarus' house.»

«But what have You done at Nazareth and at Korazim?»

«At Nazareth I greeted relatives and friends and the relatives of the two disciples. At Korazim I spoke in the synagogue and I cured a woman. We stayed at the house of the widow, whose mother died. It was a grief and a relief at the same time, because of their scanty resources and of the working time that the widow lost to take care of the invalid; she is now spinning for other people. But she is no longer in despair. What is indispensable for her, is now secured and she is thus happy. Every morning Joseph goes to work with a carpenter near the Well of Jacob to learn the trade.»

«Have those of Korazim become any better?» asks Matthew.

«No, Matthew. They are becoming worse and worse» Jesus admits frankly.

«And they ill-treated us. The mighty ones did, of course. Not the simple people.»

«It is a very awkward place. Don't go there any more» says Philip.

«It would grieve the disciple Elias, the widow and the woman I cured today, and all the other good people.»

«Yes. But they are so few that... I would not worry any more about that place. You said it Yourself: "It is unworkable"» says Thomas.

«Resin is one thing and hearts are a different thing. Something will remain, like seed buried under very hard clods of earth. It will take a long time to spring up, but it will at last come up. The same applies to Korazim. What I have sowed will begin to grow one day. One must not give up the first time one is defeated.

Listen to this parable. It could be called: "The parable of the good farmer."

A rich man owned a beautiful large vineyard, in which there were various kinds of fig-trees. The vineyard was cultivated by a servant, an expert vine-dresser and pruner of fruit-trees, who did his work with love for his master and for the trees. Every year, at the right season, the rich man used to go to his vineyard several times to see his grapes and figs ripen and to taste them, picking the fruit with his own hands. One day he went towards a fig-tree of a very good quality, the only one of that quality in the vineyard. But also on that day, as in the previous two years, he found that it was all leaves without any fruit. So he called the vine-dresser and said: "For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig-tree and I have found nothing but leaves. It is obvious that the tree has finished yielding fruit. So cut it down. It is useless to have it here taking up room and wasting your time without any profit. Cut it down, burn it, clean the ground of its roots and put another young tree in its place. In a few years' time it will yield fruit." The vinedresser, who was patient and loving, replied: "You are right. But leave it to me for another year. I will not cut it down. Nay, I will dig the ground with greater care, I will manure it and trim it. It may yield fruit again. If after this last trial it does not bear fruit, I will comply with your desire and cut it down."

Korazim is the tree that does not bear fruit. I am the Good Farmer. You are the impatient rich man. Leave it to the Good Farmer.»

«Very well. But the parable is not finished. Did the fig-tree bear fruit the following year?» asks the Zealot.

«It did not and it was cut down. But the farmer was justified for cutting down a tree which looked young and flourishing, because he had done all his duty. I also wish to be justified for cutting off some people with an axe and removing them from My vineyard, in which there are unfruitful and poisonous plants, nests of snakes, sap-suckers, parasites or poisons that spoil or injure their fellow disciples, or they penetrate creeping with their wicked roots to proliferate, without being called into My vineyard, where they rebel to being grafted, as they entered only to spy, to denigrate and to make My field sterile. I will cut

them off after trying everything to convert them. For the time being, instead of an axe, I make use of shears and of the pruner's knife, and I thin out branches and engraft... Oh! it will be hard work. Both for Me Who does it and for those who undergo the treatment. But it is to be done. So that in Heaven they may say: «He has accomplished everything, but the more He pruned, grafted, hoed and manured them, shedding perspiration, tears and blood while working, the more sterile and wicked they have become... There is the village. Go ahead, all of you and look for lodgings. You, Judas of Kerioth, stay with Me.»

They remain alone and in the twilight they proceed close to each other, in dead silence.

At last Jesus says, as if He were speaking to Himself: «And yet, even if we lose God's favour by infringing His Law, we can always become what we were, by renouncing sin...»

Judas does not reply.

Jesus resumes: «And if one understands that it is not possible to have the power of God, because God is not there where Satan is, one can easily remedy, by preferring what God grants to what our pride desires.»

Judas is silent.

They have by now reached the first house of the village and Jesus, still speaking to Himself, says: «And to think that I did severe penance that he might mend his ways and go back to his Father...»

Judas starts, raises his head, looks at Him... but does not say anything.

Jesus also looks at him... and then He asks: «Judas, to whom am I speaking?»

«To me, Master. It is because of You that I no longer have power. You took it off me to increase it in John, Simon, James, in everybody, except me. You do not love me, that's what it is! And I will end up by not loving You and by cursing the hour when I did love You and I ruined myself in the eyes of the world for a cowardly king, who is overwhelmed even by the populace. I was not expecting this from You!»

«Neither I from you. But I have never deceived you. And I have never forced you. So why do you remain with Me?»

«Because I love You. I cannot part with You. You attract me and You disgust

me. I desire You as much as I desire air to breathe and... You frighten me. Ah! I am cursed! I am damned! Why do You not drive the demon out of me, since You can?» Judas' face is livid and upset, he looks like a madman full of hatred and fear... He reminds me, although faintly, of the satanic mask of Judas on Good Friday.

And Jesus' face reminds me of the scourged Nazarene, Who sitting on an upturned tub in the courtyard of the Praetorium, looks at His sneerers with all His loving pity. He says, and a sob already appears to be in His voice: «Because there is no repentance in you, but only hatred against God, as if He were guilty of your sin.»

Judas utters a horrible curse between his teeth...

«Master, we have found lodgings. There is room for five in one place, for three in another, for two in a third place and then two places can accommodate one each. We could not find anything better» say the disciples.

«All right. I will go with Judas of Kerioth» says Jesus.

«No. I prefer to be alone. I am upset. You would not be able to rest...»

«As you wish... I will go with Bartholomew. You can do as you like. In the meantime let us go where there is more room, so that we may all have supper together.»

338. Going towards Meiron.

23rd November 1945.

A beautiful springtime dawn makes the sky rosy and the hills a pleasant sight. The disciples rejoice at the sight while gathering at the entrance of the village waiting for the late-comers.

«It is the first day that it is not cold, after the hailstorms» says Matthew, rubbing his hands. «It was time! This is the new moon of the month of Adar!» exclaims Andrew.

«Very well! If we had to go up on the mountains with the cold weather of the

past days!...» comments Philip.

«But where are we going?» asks Andrew.

«I wonder... From here we can go either to Saphet or to Meiron. And then?» replies James of Zebedee and he turns round to ask the sons of Alphaeus: «Do you know where we are going?»

«Jesus told us that He wants to go to the north. That is all» says Judas of Alphaeus laconically.

«Again? At the next moon we must begin our Passover pilgrimage...» says Peter not very enthusiastically.

«We have plenty time» remarks Thaddeus.

«Yes. But no time to rest at Bethsaida...»

«We shall certainly go there to get the women and Marjiam» replies Philip to Peter.

«What I ask of you is not to look bored or indifferent or the like. Jesus is most depressed... Yesterday evening He was weeping. I found Him weeping while we were preparing supper. He was not praying out on the terrace, as we thought. He was weeping» says John.

«Why? Did you ask Him?» they all ask.

«Yes, I did. But all He said was: “Love Me, John.”»

«Perhaps... it's because of the people of Korazim.»

The Zealot, who has just arrived, says: «The Master is coming here with Bartholomew. Let us go and meet Him.»

And they set out, but they continue their conversation: «Or it is because of Judas. They remained alone last night...» says Matthew.

«That's right! And Judas had previously stated that he was upset and wanted to be alone» remarks Philip.

«He did not want to stay even with the Master! Whereas I would have been so glad to be with Him!» says John with a sigh.

«And I!» says everybody.

«I do not like that man... He is either ill, or bewitched, or mad, or possessed... There is something wrong with him» says Thaddeus resolutely.

«And yet, believe me, on our way back here he was a model disciple. He always defended the Master and the interests of the Master, as none of us ever did. I saw him and heard him myself! And I hope you do not doubt my word» states Thomas.

«Do you think that we do not believe you? No, Thomas! And we are pleased to hear that Judas is better than we are. But you can see it yourself. He is strange, is he not?» asks Andrew.

«Oh! He certainly is. Perhaps innermost problems worry him... Or probably because he did not work any miracle. He is rather proud. Oh! for a good purpose! But he is keen on doing things and he likes to be praised for them...»

«H'm! It may be! But the Master is sad. Look at Him over there: He does not look like the man we have always known. But, long live the Lord! If I find out who is making the Master suffer... Well! That's all! I know what I will do to him» says Peter.

Jesus, Who is talking intently to Nathanael, sees them and quickens His pace smiling. «Peace to you. Are you all here?»

«Judas of Simon is missing... I thought he was with You, because at the house, where he slept, they told me that they found his room empty and tidied up...» explains Andrew.

Jesus knits His brows for a moment and becomes engrossed in thought, lowering His head. He then says: «It does not matter. Let us go just the same. Tell the people in the last houses that we are going to Meiron and to Giscala. If Judas should look for us ask them to direct him there. Let us go.»

They all feel that the atmosphere is stormy and they obey without uttering a single word.

Jesus continues His conversation with Bartholomew and is a few steps ahead of the others. I can hear famous names being mentioned by them during their conversation: Hillel, Jael, Barak and glorious events of Israel, which they recollect, commenting and admiring the great doctors, while Bartholomew regrets the past...

«Oh! If wise Hillel were still alive! He was good and strong. He would not have

been upset. He would have judged You by himself, independently of others!»

«Do not worry, Bartholomew! And bless the Most High Who has received him in His peace. The spirit of the Wise Man thus did not become aware of the excitement of so much hatred against Me...»

«My Lord! Not only hatred!...»

«More hatred than love, My friend. And it will always be so.»

«Do not be sad. We will defend You...»

«It is not death that grieves Me... It is the sight of men's sins...»

«Death!... No!... Don't speak of death. They will not go to that extent... because they are afraid...»

«Hatred will be stronger than fear. Bartholomew, when I am dead, and when I am far away, in Holy Heaven, say to men: *“He suffered more because of your hatred, than because of His death”*...»

«Master! Don't say that! No one will hate You so much as to cause You to die. You can always prevent it. You are powerful...»

Jesus smiles sadly, I would say wearily, while with measured steps He climbs the mountainous road leading to Meiron, and the more the road climbs, the wider becomes the beautiful view of the lake of Tiberias, visible through an opening in a gorge, on nearby arch-shaped hills, which, however, obstruct the sight of lake Merom, while the view extends beyond the lake of Tiberias, on the tableland beyond the Jordan, as far as the remote indented mountains of Hauran, Trachonitis and Perea.

But Jesus points to north-northeast saying: «After Passover we will have to go there, to Philip's tetrarchy. And we shall just have enough time to do so, as we shall have to be in Jerusalem once again for Pentecost.»

«Would it not be more convenient to go there now? We could go beyond the Jordan, towards its sources... and then come back through the Decapolis...»

Jesus passes His hand across His brow, with the tired gesture of one whose mind is clouded, and He whispers: «I do not know, I do not know yet!... Bartholomew!...» How much depression, sorrow, entreaty there is in His voice!...

Bartholomew bends a little, as if he were hurt by Jesus' strange unusual tone, and he says with loving anxiety: «Master, what is the matter with You? What do You want from old Nathanael?»

«Nothing, Bartholomai... Your prayer... That I may see clearly what is to be done... But they are calling us, Bartholomai... Let us stop here...» And they stop near a group of trees.

The others appear round a bend of the path; they are in a group: «Master, Judas is running after us at breakneck speed...»

«Let us wait for him.» And in fact Judas soon appears, running... «Master... I am late... I overslept and...»

«Where, if I did not find you in the house?» asks Andrew who is amazed.

Judas remains dumbfounded for a moment, but he is quick in collecting himself and he says: «Oh! I am sorry that my penance has become known to everybody! I was in the wood, all night, praying and doing penance... . At dawn I was overcome by sleep. I am weak... But the Most High Lord will pity His poor servant. Is that right, Master? I woke up late and I was aching all over.»

«In fact you look rather worn out» remarks James of Zebedee.

Judas laughs: «Of course! But my soul is delighted. Prayer does one good. Penance makes one's heart joyful. And it grants humility and generosity. Master, forgive Your foolish Judas...» and he kneels at Jesus' feet.

«Yes. Stand up and let us go.»

«Give me peace with a kiss of Yours. It will be a sign that You have forgiven the bad mood I was in yesterday. I did not want You, that is true. But it was because I wanted to pray...»

«We could have prayed together...»

Judas laughs and says: «No, You could not have prayed with me last night, or be where I was...»

«Oh! That's nice! Why not? He has always been with us and He taught us to pray!» exclaims Peter who is utterly amazed.

They all laugh. But Jesus does not laugh. He stares at Judas who has kissed Him and is now looking at Him with eyes glaring with biting malice, as if he wanted

to defy Him. He dares to repeat: «Is it not true that You could not have been with me last night?»

«No, I could not. Neither will I ever be able to share the embraces of My soul with the Father, with a third party, nothing but blood and flesh, like you, and in the places where you go. I love solitude peopled with angels, to forget that man is the stench of flesh corrupted by sensuality, by gold, by the world and by Satan.»

Judas no longer laughs, not even with his eyes. He replies gravely: «You are right. Your spirit has seen the truth. So where are we going?»

«To venerate the tombs of the great rabbis and heroes of Israel.»

«What? Gamaliel does not love You. And the others hate You» many of the apostles say.

«It does not matter. I bow to the tombs of the just awaiting Redemption. I am going to say to their bones: “He Who inspired your souls will soon be in the Kingdom of Heaven, ready to descend from there on the last Day, to make you live again and forever in Paradise.”»

They proceed until they find the village of Meiron. A lovely village, well kept, full of light and sunshine, situated among fertile hills and mountains.

«Let us stop. In the afternoon we will leave for Giscala. The great sepulchres are scattered along these slopes, awaiting the glorious resurrection.»

339. At Hillel's Sepulchre at Giscala.

24th November 1945.

From the village of Meiron Jesus and His apostles take a mountainous road that runs north-west through woods and pastures rising all the time. They have perhaps already venerated some sepulchres, because I can hear them speak about them.

The Iscariot is now ahead with Jesus. At Meiron they must have received and given alms, and Judas is now giving an account of what he received and what he

gave. He concludes saying: «And here is my offer. I swore last night I would give You it for the poor and as a penance. It is not much. I have not much money with me. But I convinced my mother to send me some frequently through many friends. In the past, when I came away from home, I had a good deal of money. But this time, as I had to travel across mountains by myself or with Thomas only, I took only what was sufficient for our journey. I prefer to do that. The only thing is... sometimes I will have to ask You for permission to leave You and go and see my friends. I have already arranged everything... Master, shall I continue to keep the money? Do You still trust me?»

«Judas, you are saying everything by yourself. And I do not know why you do that. You must know that nothing has changed as far as I am concerned... because I hope that you will change and become once again the disciple you were in the past, and that you will become a just man, for whose conversion I pray and suffer.»

«You are right, Master. But with Your help I will certainly become So. In any case... they are minor imperfections. Things of no importance. Nay, they help us to understand our fellow-men and cure them.»

«Your morals, Judas, are strange indeed! And I should say more than that. I have never heard of any doctor falling voluntarily ill in order to be able to say: “Now I know how to cure people affected by this disease.” So am I an incapable man?»

«Who says that, Master?»

«You do. As I do not commit sins, I cannot cure sinners.»

«You are You. But we are not You, and we need experience to learn...»

«That is your old idea. The very same idea of twenty months ago. The only difference is that you then thought that I should commit sin to be able to redeem. I am really surprised that you have not tried to correct this... fault of Mine, according to your way of judging, and to gift Me with this... ability to understand sinners.»

«You are joking, Master. And I am glad. I felt sorry for You. You were so sad. And it is double joy to me that I have made You joke. But I never thought of claiming to be Your master. In any case, as You can see Yourself, I have corrected my way of thinking as I now say that this experience is necessary only to us. To us, poor men. You are the Son of God, are You not? Your wisdom,

therefore, needs no experience to be what it is.»

«Well, you had better know that *innocence is also wisdom*, a much greater wisdom than the low dangerous knowledge of sinners. When the holy ignorance of evil should limit our ability to guide ourselves and other people, then the angelical ministry, which is always present in pure hearts, makes up for that. And you may rest assured that the angels, who are most pure, can tell Good from Evil and they can lead the pure souls, whom they guard, on the just path and to just deeds. Sin does not increase wisdom. It is not light. It is not a guide. Never. *It is corruption, it is derangement of mind, it is chaos*. Thus, he who commits it, tastes its flavour but at the same time loses the ability to savour many other spiritual things and no longer has an angel of God, a spirit of order and love, to guide him, instead, he has an angel of Satan to lead him into greater and greater disorder, because of the unappeasable hatred that devours those diabolical spirits.»

«Listen, Master. And if one wanted to attain angelical guidance again? Is repentance sufficient, or does the poison of sin last even after one has repented and has been forgiven?... You know? For instance, one who has taken to drinking, even if he swears that he will not get drunk again, and is really determined in swearing so, always feels the stimulus to drink. And one suffers...»

«*One certainly suffers. That is why one should never become the slave of evil. But to suffer is not to sin. It is expiation.* And as a repentant drunkard commits no sin but gains merits if he resists the stimulus heroically and does not drink any more, so he who has sinned, and repents and resists all stimuli, gains merit and will not lack supernatural help to resist. *It is not a sin to be tempted. On the contrary it is a battle that brings victory.* And believe Me, *in God there is only the desire to forgive and help who has done wrong but has later repented...*»

Judas is silent for a little while... Then he takes Jesus' hand and kisses it, remaining bent over it: «Last night I exceeded the limit. I insulted You, Master. I told You that I would end up by hating You... How much I blasphemed! Can I ever be forgiven?»

«*The greatest sin is to despair of God's mercy...* Judas, I said: “*Every sin against the Son of man will be forgiven.*” The Son of Man has come to forgive, to save, to cure, to lead souls to Heaven. Why do you want to lose Heaven? Judas! Look at Me! Wash your soul in the love emanating from My eyes...»

«Do I not disgust You?»

«Yes, you do... But love is stronger than disgust. Judas, poor leper, the greatest leper in Israel, come and invoke health from Him Who can give it to you...»

«Give me it, Master.»

«No. Not that way. *There is no true repentance or firm will in you.* There is only a faint effort of surviving love for Me and for your past vocation. There is a hint of repentance, but it is entirely human. That is not entirely bad. Nay, it is the first step towards Good. Cultivate it, increase it, graft it into the supernatural, *change it into real love for Me*, make it a real return to what you were when you came to Me, at least that! *Make it not a temporary, emotional inactive throb of sentimentalism, but a true active feeling* attracting you to Good. Judas, I will wait. I can wait. I will pray. I will take the place of your disgusted angel, while waiting. My pity, patience and love are perfect and therefore greater than the pity, patience and love of angels, and I can remain beside you, in the disgusting stench of what is fermenting in your heart, in order to help you...»

Judas is moved, he is really moved, he is not simulating. With trembling lips and voice made shaky by his emotion, looking pale, he asks: «Do You really know what I have done?»

«I know everything, Judas. Do you want Me to tell you or shall I spare you this humiliation?»

«I... cannot believe it...»

«Well let us go over the past few days and tell the incredulous apostle the truth. This morning you lied several times. With regard to the money and to where you spent the night. Last night you tried to suffocate in lust your feelings, your hatred, your remorse. You...»

«That's enough! That's enough! For pity's sake, say no more! Or I will run away from Your presence.»

«On the contrary, you ought to cling to My knees and ask to be forgiven.»

«Yes, forgive me, Master! Forgive me! Help me! It's stronger than I am. Everything is stronger than I am.»

«Except the love you ought to have for Jesus... But come here, that I may help you to resist temptation and relieve you of it.» And He takes Judas in His arms shedding silent tears on his dark, haired head.

The others, who are a few yards behind, have wisely stopped and comment:

«See?! Perhaps Judas is really in trouble.»

«And this morning he has spoken to the Master about it.»

«What a fool! I would have done so straight away.»

«It is probably something painful.»

«Oh! It is certainly not bad behaviour of his mother! She is a holy woman! What can be so painful?»

«Perhaps business not doing well...»

«No! He spends and helps people generously.»

«Well! It's his business! The important thing is that he is in agreement with the Master, and that seems to be the case. They have been talking for some time and peacefully. They are now embracing each other... Very well.»

«Yes, because he is very capable and has many acquaintances it is a good thing that he is of good will and in agreement with us and above all with the Master.»

«Jesus at Hebron said that the tombs of the just are places where miracles are worked, or something like that... There are many of them here. Perhaps those of Meiron worked a miracle for Judas' perturbation.»

«Oh! if so, he will become entirely holy now at Hillel's sepulchre. Is it not at Giscala?»

«Yes, Bartholomew.»

«And yet last year we did not come this way...»

«No wonder! We came from the other side!»

Jesus turns round and calls them. They run towards Him joyfully.

«Come. The town is close at hand. We must cross it to arrive at Hillel's tomb. Let us proceed in one group» says Jesus without any further information, while the eleven apostles cast inquisitive side glances at Him and Judas. The latter's face looks pacified and humble, and Jesus' is certainly not radiant. He is solemn but grave.

They enter Giscala, a beautiful large well-kept town. There must be a flourishing rabbinical centre because I see many groups of doctors with disciples listening to their lessons. The apostles passing through and the Master especially draw the attention of many people and a great deal of them follow the group.

Some sneer, some call Judas of Kerioth. But he is walking beside the Master and does not even turn round.

They go out of town towards the house in the neighbourhood of which is Hillel's sepulchre.

«How impudent of You!»

«He is imprudent and impudent!»

«He is provoking us.»

«Desecrator!»

«Tell Him, Uzziel.»

«I will not be contaminated. Saul, you are only a pupil, you can tell Him.»

«No. Let us tell Judas. Call him.»

The young man, whose name is Saul, a thin pale fellow with very large eyes and mouth, approaches Judas and says to him: «Come. The rabbis want you.»

«I will not come. I am staying where I am. Leave me alone.» The young man goes back to his masters and tells them.

In the meantime Jesus, in the middle of His apostles, is praying reverently near Hillel's whitewashed sepulchre.

The rabbis approach the group slowly, like silent snakes, and watch, and two elderly bearded ones pull the tunic of Judas, who, since they gathered to pray, is no longer protected by his companions.

«Well, what do you want?» he asks in a low but resentful voice. «Is one not even allowed to pray?»

«Just one word. Then we will leave you in peace.» Simon Zealot and Thaddeus turn round and tell the noisy disturbers to be quiet. Judas moves a few steps aside and asks: «What do you want?»

I do not hear what the older man whispers in Judas' ear. But I distinctly see the gesture of Judas who steps aside resolutely saying: «No. Leave me in peace, poisoned souls. I don't know you, I don't want to have anything more to do with you.»

The rabbinical group burst into a scornful laugh and threaten: «Watch what you do, you silly boy!»

«You had better watch. Go away! You can go and tell the others. All the others.

Have you understood? You can apply to anybody You like, but not to me, you devils» and he leaves them. He has spoken so loudly that the apostles turn round dumbfounded. Jesus does not. Not even after the scornful laugh and threat: «We will see you again, Judas of Simon! We will meet again!» that resounds in the silence of the place.

Judas goes back to his place, he moves aside Andrew who had gone close to Jesus, and as if he wished to be defended and protected, he takes the hem of Jesus' mantle in his hands.

The angry men then rage against Jesus. They come forth threatening and shouting: «What are You doing here, You, anathema of Israel? Go away? Don't make the bones of the Just man, whom You are not worthy to approach, stir in the grave. We will tell Gamaliel and will have You punished.»

Jesus turns round and looks at them, one at a time.

«Why are You looking at us like that, You demoniac?»

«To become better acquainted with your faces and your hearts. Because not only My apostle will see you again. I will, as well. And I want to know you well so that I can recognise you at once.»

«Well have You seen us? Go away. If Gamaliel were here, he would not allow You to be here.»

«I was here last year with him...»

«That is not true, You liar!»

«Ask him, and since he is an honest man, he will tell that I was here with him. I love and venerate Hillel, I respect and honour Gamaliel. They are two men through whose justice and wisdom the origin of man is revealed, as they remind us that man was made in the likeness of God.»

«We don't, do we?» interrupt the energumens.

«It is dimmed in you by interests and hatred.»

«Listen to Him! That is how He speaks and offends in the house of other people. Go away from here, corrupter of the best people in Israel! Or we will have to pick up stones. Rome is not here to protect You, You intriguer with the heathen enemy...»

«Why do you hate Me? Why do you persecute Me? What wrong have I done you? Some of you have benefited from Me; everybody has been respected by Me. So why are you so cruel against Me?» Jesus is humble, meek, afflicted and loving. He implores them to love Him.

They take it as a sign of weakness and fear and they become more furious. The first stone flies skimming James of Zebedee, who quickly makes the gesture of reacting by throwing it against the assailers, while all the others gather round Jesus. But they are twelve against about one hundred. Another stone strikes Jesus' hand while He is telling His disciples not to react. The back of His hand is injured and bleeds. It seems to be already wounded by the nail...

Jesus then stops praying. He straightens up imposingly, looks at them and crushes them with a glare. But another stone strikes the temple of James of Alphaeus and it begins to bleed.

Jesus is now compelled to paralyse their action by means of His power, to defend His apostles, who obeying Him, receive the volley of stones without reacting. And when the cowards are overwhelmed by Jesus' will and by His frightful imposing attitude, He says: «I am going. But you must know that Hillel would have cursed you for what you are doing. I am going away. But remember that not even the Red Sea prevented the Israelites from going on the way pointed out to them by God. Everything flattened out and became a level road for the passing God. The same applies to Me. As Egyptians, Philistines, Amorites, Canaanites and other peoples could not stop the triumphal march of Israel, so you, who are worse than they were, will not be able to stop My march and mission: Israel. Remember what they sang at the well of the water given by God: "Rise, o well, that was sunk by the princes and dug by the leaders of the people, with the giver of the Law, with their staves." I am that Well! It was dug by Heaven in response to the prayers and the justice of the true princes and leaders of the holy People, which you are not. No. You are not. The Messiah would never have come for you, because you do not deserve Him. In fact His coming is your ruin. Because the Most High is aware of all the thoughts of men and has always been aware of them, even before Cain, from whom you descend, existed, and before Abel, whom I resemble, before Noah, My symbol, and before Moses who first used My symbol, before Balaam who prophesied the Star, before Isaiah and all the prophets. And God knows your hearts and is struck with horror at them. He has always been horrified at them as He has always rejoiced at the just for whose sake it was just to send Me and who really

drew Me from the depths of Heaven, that I might bring Living Water for the thirst of men. I am the Source of eternal Life. But you do not wish to drink at it. And you will die.» And He walks slowly through the paralysed rabbis and their pupils and goes on His way, slowly, solemnly, in the amazed silence of men and things.

340. The Deaf-Mute Cured near the Phoenician Border.

25th November 1945.

I do not know where the pilgrims spent the night. I know that it is morning once again, that they are on their way, still across mountainous places, that Jesus' hand is bandaged, and so is the forehead of James of Alphaeus, while Andrew is limping badly and James of Zebedee is without his bag, which his brother John is carrying.

Twice Jesus has asked: «Can you manage to walk, Andrew?»

«Yes, Master. I walk badly because of the bandage. But it is not very painful.» And the second time he adds: «And what about Your hand, Master?»

«A hand is not a leg. It is resting and it is not very sore.»

«H'm! Swollen as it is and with the wound into the bone, I can hardly believe that it is not very sore... Oil is good for it. But perhaps we should have got some of that ointment of Your Mother's from...»

«From My Mother. You are right» says Jesus quickly on hearing what is about to escape the lips of Peter, who blushes with embarrassment and looks desolately at Jesus. The Master smiles at him and lays His injured hand on Peter's shoulder to draw him to Himself.

«It will hurt if You hold it thus.»

«No, Simon. You love Me and your love is a very wholesome oil.»

«Oh! In that case You should already be cured! We have all suffered seeing You ill-treated like that, and there are some of us who wept.» And Peter looks at John and Andrew...

«Oil and water are good medicines, but tears of love and pity are more powerful than anything. See? I am much more cheerful today than yesterday. Because today I know how obedient you are and how much you love Me. Everyone.» And Jesus looks at them with His habitually sad mild eyes, which this morning are shining, although faintly, with joy.

«But what hyenas they are! Never seen so much hatred!» says Judas of Alphaeus. «They must have been all Judaeans.»

«No, brother. Regions have nothing to do with it. Hatred is the same everywhere. Remember that I was driven out of Nazareth months ago and they wanted to pelt Me with stones. Do you not remember?» says Jesus calmly, which comforts the Judaeen apostles for Thaddeus' words.

They are in fact so consoled that the Iscariot says: «But I will tell them that! Oh! I will indeed! We were not doing anything wrong. We did not react, and He spoke of nothing but love from the very beginning. And they threw stones at us, as if we were snakes. I will tell them.»

«And who are you going to tell, if they are all against us?»

«I know who I will tell. In the meantime, I will tell Hermas and Stephen as soon as I see them. And Gamaliel will know at once. But at Passover I know who I will tell. I will say: "It is not fair to do that. Your fury is against the law. You are guilty, not He."»

«It would be better if you did not approach those men!... I think that you are guilty in their eyes, as well» advises Philip wisely.

«That's true. It is better if I never get in touch with them again. Yes. It is better. But I will tell Stephen. He is good and has no poison...»

«Never mind, Judas. You would not change anything for the better. I have forgiven them. Let us forget about it» says Jesus calmly and convincingly.

Twice, crossing two little streams both Andrew and the two Jameses dampen the bandages on their bruises. Jesus does not. He proceeds peacefully as if He felt no pain.

But His hand must be really sore, if He has to ask Andrew to break His bread, when they stop to eat; and if He has to beg Matthew to tie His sandal, when the sandal laces come undone... Above all, if, when going down a steep short cut, He bumps into a tree trunk, because His foot has slipped, and He cannot help

moaning, while His bandage becomes stained once again with blood. In fact they stop at the first house of the village, where they arrive at sunset, to ask for some water and oil to doctor His hand, which, once the bandage has been removed, looks all swollen with a large bluish bruise on the back and the red wound in the middle. While waiting for the landlady to come with what they have asked for, they all bend to look at the wound and they make their comments. But John moves away to one side to hide his tears.

Jesus calls him: «Come here. It is nothing serious. Do not weep.»

«I know. If I had it, I would not weep. But You have it. And You are not telling us how painful is this dear hand, which has never harmed anybody» replies John, to whom Jesus has abandoned His wounded hand; and John gently caresses the finger-tips, the wrist, all around the bruise and then gently turns it over to kiss the palm and rest his cheek in the hollow of the hand saying: «It is hot!... How painful it must be!» and loving tears drop on it.

The woman brings water and oil and John with a piece of linen cleans the blood that stains the hand, gently pouring some lukewarm water on the wound, which he then dresses with oil, and binds up with clean strips of cloth and finally kisses the binding. Jesus lays His other hand on John's lowered head.

The woman asks him: «Is He your brother?»

«No. He is my Master. Our Master.»

«Where have you come from?» she asks the others.

«From the Sea of Galilee.»

«So far! Why?»

«To preach Salvation.»

«It is almost evening. Stop in my house. It's a poor house. But we are honest. I can give you some milk as soon as my sons come back with the sheep. My husband will be pleased to welcome you.»

«Thank you, woman. We will stay here if the Master wishes so.»

The woman goes away to do her housework while the apostles ask Jesus what to do.

«Yes. It is a good idea. Tomorrow we will go to Kedesh and then towards

Paneas. I have been thinking, Bartholomew. It is better to do as you suggested. You gave Me a good piece of advice. I hope I will thus be able to find other disciples and send them ahead of Me to Capernaum. I know that some must have already been to Kedesh, and the three shepherds from Lebanon are among them.»

The woman comes back and asks: «Well?»

«Yes, good woman. We are staying here for the night.»

«And for supper. Oh! accept my invitation. It is no burden to me. And after all we have been taught to be merciful by some men who are the disciples of that Jesus of Galilee, who is called the Messiah and works so many miracles and preaches the Kingdom of God. But He has never been here. Perhaps because we are at the SyroPhoenician border. But His disciples came. And that is already a lot! Here in the village, we all want to go to Judaea at Passover, to see if we can find this Jesus. Because we have some sick people and His disciples cured some of them but not everyone. Among the latter there is the young son of a brother of my brother-in-law's wife.»

«What is the matter with him?» asks Jesus smiling.

«He is... He does not speak and he does not hear. Perhaps a demon entered the womb of his mother to make her suffer and drive her to despair. But he is good, not like a possessed. The disciples said that Jesus of Nazareth is needed for him, because there must be something missing, and only that Jesus... Oh! here are my sons and my husband! Melkiah, I have welcomed these pilgrims in the name of the Lord and I was telling them about Levi... Sarah, go and milk the sheep and you, Samuel, go down into the grotto and bring some oil and wine and get also some apples in the attic. Hurry up, Sarah, we will prepare the beds upstairs.»

«Do not tire yourself, woman. Any place will suit us. Could I see the man of whom you were speaking?»

«Yes... But... Oh! Lord! Are You perhaps the Nazarene?»

«I am.»

The woman drops on her knees shouting: «Melkiah, Sarah, Samuel! Come and worship the Messiah! What a day! And I have Him in my house! And I have been speaking to Him! And I brought Him water to cleanse His wound... Oh!...» she is choking with emotion. She then runs to the basin and sees that it is empty:

«Why have you thrown that water out? It was holy water! Oh! Melkiah! The Messiah is here with us.»

«Yes, but be good, woman and do not tell anybody. Go and get the deaf-mute and bring him here...» says Jesus smiling...

... And Melkiah is soon back with the deaf-mute, his relatives and at least half of the people in the village... The mother of the poor fellow worships Jesus and implores Him.

«Yes, it will be done as you wish» and He takes the deaf-mute by the hand and draws him away from the crowd, who are pressing together and whom the apostles are busy pushing back, to protect Jesus' wounded hand. Jesus draws the deaf-mute close to Himself, puts His forefingers into his ears, touches his lips with His tongue, then raising His eyes to the sky, which is growing dark, He breathes on the face of the man and shouts in a loud voice: «Be opened!» and lets him go.

The young man looks at Him for a moment while the crowds whisper. The change in the countenance of the deaf-mute is surprising: from listless and sad it becomes amazed and smiling. He touches his ears with his hands, presses them, takes his hands away... He persuades himself that he can really hear, he opens his mouth saying: «Mother! I can hear! Oh! Lord, I adore You!»

The crowd is seized by the usual enthusiasm, also because they ask one another: «How can he be able to speak if he never heard a word since he was born? A miracle in the miracle! He loosened his tongue and opened his ears and at the same time He taught him to speak. Long live Jesus of Nazareth! Hosanna to the Holy Messiah!»

And they press against Jesus Who raises His wounded hand to bless them, while some, urged by the woman of the house, wet their faces and limbs with the remaining drops of water left in the basin.

Jesus sees them and shouts: «Because of your faith you are all cured. Go home. Be good and honest. Believe in the word of the Gospel. And keep to yourselves what you know, until it is time to announce it in the squares and throughout the whole world. May My peace be with you.»

And He goes into the large kitchen where the fire is blazing and the light of two lamps flickers.

341. At Kedesh. The Signs of the Times.

26th November 1945.

The town of Kedesh is built on a little mountain, at a short distance from a long chain of mountains, on its eastern side, stretching from north to south. A parallel chain of hills stretches also from north to south on its western side. The two parallel lines, however, bend inwards at their central part forming a rough 'X'. In the narrowest part, a little closer to the eastern chain, there is the mountain on the slopes of which Kedesh is built. The town stretches from the top down to the almost flat slopes and dominates a fresh green valley, which is very narrow to the east and wider to the west.

It is a beautiful walled town, with lovely houses and a magnificent synagogue; there is also an imposing fountain with many jets that pour abundance of cool water into a basin, from which little streams flow to feed other fountains or, probably, to water gardens. I do not know.

Jesus enters the town on a market day. His hand is no longer bandaged, but there is still a dark scab and a large bruise on the back of it. James of Alphaeus also has a small dark reddish scab on his temple and a large bruise around it. Andrew and James of Zebedee, who were not so badly injured, show no sign of the past incident and they walk fast, looking around, and particularly at their sides and behind them, as the apostles have formed little groups around the Master. I am under the impression that they have stopped for two or three days at the place that I described yesterday or in its neighborhood, perhaps to rest or to keep at a good distance from rabbis, in the event the latter should turn their steps towards the main towns, hoping to catch them at fault and injure them again. At least that is what I gather from their conversation.

«But this is a city of refuge!» says Andrew.

«And would you expect them to respect the refuge and holiness of any place! How simple you are, brother!» Peter replies to him.

Jesus is walking between the two Judases. James and John are ahead of Him, in the van, and behind them there is the other James with Philip and Matthew.

Peter, Andrew and Thomas are behind the Master. Simon Zealot and Bartholomew are the last two.

Everything goes well as far as the entrance to a beautiful square, the one with the fountain and the synagogue, where many people are discussing business. The market, instead, is farther down, to the south-west of the town, where two roads join: the main road from the south, and the road along which Jesus came, from the west; the two roads meet at a right angle and form one road only that enters through the gate and widens into a rectangular square, where there are donkeys, mats, vendors, buyers and the usual clamor...

But when they reach the most beautiful square – the heart of the town, I think, not so much because it is equidistant from the perimeter of the walls, but because the spiritual and commercial life of Kedesh thrives here, as appears also from its high dominating position, above most of the town, which is suitable to be defended like a citadel – trouble begins. Like snarling dogs awaiting to attack a defenseless puppy, or rather, like blood-hounds on the watch for game that they smell in the wind, a large number of Pharisees and Sadducees are leaning against the wide portal, ornate with sculptures and decorations, of the synagogue. Mingled with them, to poison them completely, there is a handful of the rabbis we saw at Giscala, and among them there is Uzziel. They immediately point out Jesus and the apostles to one another.

«Alas! Lord! They are here as well!» exclaims John, who is obviously frightened, turning round to speak to Jesus.

«Be not afraid. Go on fearlessly. But if any of you do not feel like facing those rogues, let them go back to the hotel. I definitely want to speak here, in this Levitical city of refuge.»

They all protest: «Can You believe that we would leave You alone?! Let them kill us all, if they want. We will share Your lot.»

Jesus passes before the enemy group and stops near the wall of a garden where a pear-tree is shedding its white blossoms. The dark wall and the white cloud outline the Christ Who has His twelve apostles before Him.

Jesus begins to speak: «Come and listen to the Gospel, all of you who are gathered here, because the conquest of the Kingdom of Heaven is more important than trade and money...» His beautiful loud voice fills the square and makes people turn towards Him.

«Oh! That is the Galilean Rabbi!» says one. «Come, let us go and listen to Him. Perhaps He will work a miracle.»

And another adds: I saw Him work one at Bethgenna. How well He speaks! Nothing like those predatory hawks and astute snakes.»

Jesus is soon surrounded by a crowd. And He continues to speak to the attentive listeners.

«From the heart of this Levitical town I do not wish to remind you of the Law. I know that it is present in your hearts, as in few towns in Israel, as is proved by the order I have noticed here, by the honesty I found in your merchants from whom I bought food for Myself and My little flock, and by this synagogue, which is as ornate as is suitable to the place where God is worshipped. But in each of you there is also a place where God is honored, a place where the most holy yearnings are, where the sweetest words of hope resound with the most ardent prayers that your hope may become true. *Your souls*. The holy unique place that speaks of God and to God, while waiting for the Promise to be accomplished. *And the Promise is accomplished*. Israel has its Messiah, Who brings you the news and the certainty that *the time of Grace has come, that Redemption is close at hand, that the Savior is among you, and the invincible Kingdom has begun*. How many times have you heard Habakkuk! And the more meditative ones among you whispered: “I also can say: ‘How long, O Lord, am I to cry for help, while You will not listen?’” Israel has been wailing thus for ages. *But the Savior has now come*. The great robbery, the endless trouble, disorder and injustice brought about by Satan are about to collapse, because the envoy of God is on the point of restoring man *to his dignity of son of God and co-heir of the Kingdom of God*. Let us look at Habakkuk’s prophecy with fresh eyes and we will see that it bears witness to Me, and it already speaks the language of the Gospel, which I bring to the children of Israel. But now it is I who must wail: “Sentence was passed, but opposition is triumphing.” And I moan so sorrowfully. Not so much for My own sake, as I am above human judgment, as for those who are in opposition and thus condemn themselves, and for those who are misled by opposers. Are you surprised at what I am saying? Among you there are merchants from other parts of Israel. They can confirm that I am not lying. I do not lie by leading a life that is the opposite of what I teach, by not doing what people expect the Savior to do, neither do I lie by stating that human opposition sets itself up against the judgment of God, Who sent Me, and against the judgment of humble sincere crowds who have heard

Me and judged Me for what I am.»

Some of the people in the crowd whisper: «That is true! It is true indeed! We belong to the people and we want Him and we know that He is holy. But they (and they point to the Pharisees and their companions) are hostile to Him.»

Jesus continues: «And because of that opposition the Law is torn to pieces, and will be torn more and more, until it will be abolished, in order to do a supreme wrong, which, however, will not last long. And blessed are those, who during the short fearful pause, when opposition will appear to have triumphed over Me, have continued to believe in Jesus of Nazareth, in the Son of God, in the Son of man, predicted by the Prophets. I could fulfill the judgment of God to the very end, by saving all the children of Israel. But I will not be able because the impious will triumph against themselves, against their own better part, and as they trample on My rights and oppress My believers, *so they will trample on the rights of their souls, which need Me to be saved* and which are presented to Satan in order to deny them to Me.»

The Pharisees begin to murmur. But a stately old man has just approached the place where Jesus is, and now, in a pause of His speech, he says: «Please. Come into the synagogue and teach us there. No one is more entitled to do so than You are. I am Matthias, the head of the synagogue. Come, and may the Word of God be in my house as it is on Your lips.»

«Thank you, O just man of Israel. My peace be always with you.»

And Jesus, through the crowd that opens to let Him pass and then closes like a wake following Him, crosses the square again and enters the synagogue, after passing before the snarling Pharisees. But they enter the synagogue as well, elbowing their way overbearingly. But the people look unfavorably on them saying: «Where are you from? Go and wait for the Rabbi in your own synagogues. This is our house and we do not want strangers here.» And the rabbis, Sadducees and Pharisees must put up with the situation and remain quietly near the entrance to avoid being thrown out by the citizens of Kedesh.

Jesus is near the head of the synagogue and other people of the synagogue; I do not know whether they are his sons or assistants. He resumes speaking: «Habakkuk says: – and how lovingly he invites you to meditate! – “Cast your eyes over the nations, look, and be amazed and astounded, for something has happened in your own days, which no man will believe when he is told of it.” Even nowadays we have physical enemies in Israel. But let us leave out the little

detail of the prophecy and consider only the great prediction contained in it. Because prophecies always have a spiritual meaning, even when they appear to have a material reference. So the event that has taken place – and is such that no one will accept it unless one is convinced of the infinite goodness of the True God – is that He has sent His Word to save and redeem the World. God Who parts from God to save the guilty creature. And I have been sent for that. And none of the powers in the world will be able to hold back the impetus of My Triumph over kings and tyrants, over sin and stupidity. I will win because I am the Triumpher.»

A scornful laugh is heard together with a shout from the end of the synagogue. People protest and the head of the synagogue, whose eyes are closed, as he is so engrossed in listening to Jesus, stands up and commands silence, threatening to have the disturbers expelled.

«Let them speak. Invite them to expound their objections» says Jesus in a loud voice.

«Oh! good! Very well! Let us come near You. We want to ask You some questions» shout the contradictors ironically.

«Come. People of Kedesh, let them pass.»

And the crowd, casting hostile glances and making faces at them – with a few reviling epithets as well – let them pass.

«What do you want to know?» Jesus asks severely.

«So You say that You are the Messiah? Are You really sure?»

Jesus, standing with folded arms, looks at the man who has spoken with such overwhelming authority, that his irony immediately vanishes and he becomes silent.

But another one resumes speaking: «You cannot expect us to believe You on Your word. Anyone can lie, even in good faith. One needs proofs to believe. So prove to us that You really are what You say.»

«Israel is full of My proofs» replies Jesus sharply.

«Oh! those!... Trifles that any holy man can work. They have already been done and will be done again by the just in Israel!» says a Pharisee.

Another one adds: «Neither is it certain that You do them through holiness and

the help of God! In fact they say, and it is really credible, that You are helped by Satan. We want other proofs. Of a superior level. That Satan cannot give.»

«Of course! A victory over death...» says another one.

«You have already had it.»

«They were cases of catalepsy. Show us a decomposed body that revives and is recomposed, for instance. So that we may be sure that God is with You. God: the Only One Who can give life back to mud that is becoming dust again.»

«No one ever asked the Prophets for that in order to believe them.»

A Sadducee shouts: «You are greater than a Prophet. You are the Son of God, at least so You say!... Ah! Ah! So why do You not act as God? Come On! Give us a sign!»

«Yes! A sign from Heaven proving that You are the Son of God, we will then worship You» shouts a Pharisee.

«Certainly! You are right, Simon! We do not want to commit Aaron's sin again. We will not worship an idol, the golden calf. But we could worship the Lamb of God! Are You not it? Providing Heaven proves that You are» says the one named Uzziel, and who was at Giscala, laughing sarcastically.

Another one shouts: «Let me speak, for I am Sadoc, the golden scribe. Listen to me, Christ. You have been preceded by too many false Christs. We have had enough frauds. We want a sign that You really are Christ. And if God is with You, He cannot deny You that. And we will believe in You and help You. Otherwise You know what is due to You, according to the Commandment of God.»

Jesus raises His injured hand and shows it to His interlocutor. «Do you see this sign? You did it. You have pointed out a further sign. And when you see it incised in the flesh of the Lamb, you will rejoice. Look at it! Can you see it? You will see it also in Heaven, when you appear to give an account of your way of living. Because I will be your Judge, and I will be there with My glorified Body, with the signs of My ministry and of yours, of My love and of your hatred. And you will see it, too, Uzziel, and you, Simon, and Caiaphas and Annas will see it, and many more, on that Last Day, the day of wrath, the dreadful day, and you will then prefer to be in the abyss, because the sign on My injured hand will torture you more than the fire of Hell.»

«Oh! those are blasphemous words! You will be in Heaven with Your body?! Blasphemer! You will be judge in the place of God?! Anathema on You! You are insulting the Pontiff! You deserve to be stoned» shout in chorus Pharisees, Sadducees and doctors.

The head of the synagogue stands up again: he looks patriarchal and stately in his old age, like a Moses, and he shouts: «Kedesh is a city of refuge and a Levitical city. Respect it...»

«That's an old story! It doesn't count any more!»

«Oh! Blasphemous tongues! You are sinners, not He, and I will defend Him. He is not saying anything wrong. He is explaining the Prophets and has brought us the Good Promise, and you are interrupting, provoking and offending Him. I will not allow that. He is under the protection of old Matthias of the stock of Levi by father and of Aaron by mother. Go out and let Him instruct my old age and the youth of my sons.» And he lays his old wrinkled hand on Jesus' forearm, in a gesture of protection.

«Let Him give us a real sign and we will be convinced and go away» the hostile group shouted.

«Do not be upset, Matthias. I will speak» says Jesus calming the head of the synagogue. And addressing the Pharisees, Sadducees and doctors, He says: «In the evening you scan the sky, and if it is red at sunset, you state, according to an old saying: "The weather will be fine tomorrow, because sunset has reddened the sky." Likewise at dawn, when the heavy foggy damp air prevents the sun from shining as brightly as gold, you say: "There will be a storm before the day is over." So you can tell the future of the day by the changeable signs of the sky and by the even more inconstant signs of winds. And you cannot tell the signs of times? That does no credit to your minds and your science, and brings utter dishonor on your souls and your alleged wisdom. You belong to a wicked adulterous generation, born in Israel of a marriage of one who fornicates with Evil. You are their heirs and you increase your wickedness and adultery by repeating the sin of the fathers of that error. Well, listen, Matthias, and you, citizens of Kedesh and whoever is present here either as a believer or as an enemy, listen! This is the prophecy that I make, of My own, in the place of the one of Habakkuk, which I wanted to explain to you: *this wicked and adulterous generation, which is asking for a sign, will be given no other sign but the sign of Jonah...* Let us go. Peace be with everyone of good will.» And through a side

door that opens on a quiet street among gardens and houses, Jesus goes away with His disciples.

But the people of Kedesh do not give in. Some follow Him, and when they see Him enter a small hotel in the eastern suburbs of the town, they inform the head of the synagogue and their fellow citizens. And Jesus is still eating when the sunny yard of the hotel becomes crowded with people and the old head of the synagogue and other elders of Kedesh go to the door of the room in which Jesus is, and the old man, bowing, implores: «Master, the desire to hear Your word is still in our hearts. The prophecy by Habakkuk was so beautiful, as You were explaining it! Are those who love You and believe in Your Truth to be left without the knowledge of You, only because there are some people who hate You?»

«No, father. It would not be fair to punish the good because of the wicked. Well, listen...» (and Jesus stops eating and goes to the door to speak to those who have thronged in the peaceful yard).

«The words of your head of the synagogue echo those of Habakkuk. On his own behalf and yours, he confesses and professes that I am the Truth. Habakkuk confesses and professes: “You have been since the beginning and You are with us and we shall not die.” And so it will be. *He who believes in Me will not perish.* The Prophet describes Me as the One Whom God has appointed to judge, as the One Whom God made strong in order to punish, as the One Whose eyes are too pure to rest on wickedness and Who cannot bear iniquity. But while it is true that sin disgusts Me, you can see that, as I am the Savior, I open My arms to those who have repented of their sins. I thus turn My eyes towards culprits and I invite the impious to repent...

People of the Levitical city of Kedesh, the city sanctified by the proclamation of charity towards those who are guilty of crimes – and every man is guilty towards God, his soul and his neighbor – come to Me, the Refuge of sinners. Here, in My love, not even the anathema of God would strike you, because My imploring glance would change the anathema of God into blessings of forgiveness for you.

Listen! Write this promise in your hearts as Habakkuk wrote his certain prophecy on a roll. It is written there: “If it comes slowly, wait, because He Who is to come, will come without fail.” Now: He Who was to come, has come: it is I.

“He who is incredulous, has not a righteous soul” says the Prophet and his word

condemns those who provoked and insulted Me. I do not condemn them. But the Prophet, who foresaw Me and believed in Me, condemns them. As he describes Me, the Triumpher, so he describes a proud man, saying that he is not honorable, as he opened his soul to greed and insatiability, as hell is greedy and insatiable. And he threatens: “Trouble is coming to the man who amasses goods that are not his and loads himself with thick mud.” Evil deeds against the Son of man are that mud, and the desire to deprive Him of His holiness so that it may not dim one's own, is greed.

The Prophet says: “Trouble is coming to the man who grossly exploits others for the sake of his house, to fix his nest on high and so evade the hand of misfortune.” He who does that disgraces himself and kills his own soul. “Trouble is coming to the man who builds a town with blood and founds a city on crime.” Really too many in Israel build the castles of their covetousness on tears and blood, and are awaiting the last blood to make a richer mixture. But what can a fortress do against the arrows of God? And what can a handful of men do against the justice of the whole world shouting for horror at the unequalled crime?

Oh! How well Habakkuk says! “What is the use of a carved image?.” And the false holiness of Israel is nothing but an idolatrous statue. The Lord only is in His holy Temple and to Him only the earth will bow and tremble with adoration and fear, while the promised sign will be given a first time and a second time and the true Temple in which God rests will ascend gloriously to say in Heaven: “It has been accomplished!”, as He will have whispered it to the earth to cleanse it through His announcement.

“Fiat!” said the Most High. And the world was created. “Fiat” the Redeemer will say, and the world will be redeemed. I will give the world the means to be redeemed. And those will be redeemed who want to be so.

Now stand up! Let us say the prayer of the Prophet, but as it is right to say it in this time of grace:

“I heard, O Lord, Your announcement and I rejoiced.” It is no longer the time of fright, O believers in the Messiah.

“Lord, Your work is in the middle of the course of years, make It live, notwithstanding the snares of enemies. In the middle of the course of years You will manifest it.” Yes. When the time is completed the work will be accomplished.

“His mercy will shine, notwithstanding His wrath” because His wrath will strike only those who have cast nets or laid snares or shot arrows at the Lamb Savior.

“From the Light God will come to the world.” I am the Light that came to bring you God. My splendor will inundate the earth springing in torrents “where the pointed horns” will have torn to pieces the Flesh of the Victim, the last victory “of Death and of Satan, who will be beaten and will flee before the Living Holy One.”

Glory to the Lord! Glory to the Creator of the world! Glory to the Giver of the sun and stars! To the Maker of the mountains. To the Creator of the seas. Glory, infinite Glory to the Good Lord, Who wanted the Christ to save His people and redeem man.

Join Me, sing with Me, because Mercy has come to the world and the time of Peace is close at hand. He Who stretches out His hands to you, exhorts you to believe and live in the Lord because Israel will be shortly judged with justice.

Peace to you who are present here, to your families and to your homes.»

Jesus makes a wide gesture blessing them and is about to withdraw.

But the head of the synagogue begs Him: «Stay a little longer.»

«I cannot, father.»

«At least send us Your apostles.»

«You will have them without fail. Goodbye. Go in peace.»

They are alone...

«I would like to know who sent them our way. They look like necromancers...» says Peter.

The Iscariot turns pale and comes forward. He kneels at Jesus' feet. «Master, I am the culprit. I spoke in that village... to one of them, whose guest I was...»

«What? Was that your penance? You are...»

«Be silent, Simon of Jonah! Your brother is accusing himself sincerely. Respect him because of his humiliation. Do not worry, Judas. I forgive you. You know that I forgive. But be wiser the next time... And now let us go. We will walk as long as it is moonlight. We must cross the river before dawn. Let us go. The wood begins over there. Both the good and the wicked will lose trace of us.

Tomorrow we will be on the way to Paneas.»

342. Going towards Caesarea Philippi. Peter's Primacy.

27th November 1945.

The Jordan runs across a plain before flowing into lake Merom. It is a beautiful plain where cereals grow more and more vigorously day by day and fruit-trees blossom. The hills beyond which Kedesh lies, are now behind the pilgrims, who are walking fast at daybreak. They appear to be very cold, as they cast keen glances at the rising sun and they look for it, as soon as its rays shine on meadows and caress leaves. They must have slept out in the open, or at most in a stack-yard, because their garments are creased and show particles of straw and dry leaves, which they remove as they see them in the light, which is becoming clearer and clearer.

The river is detected through its gurgling, which sounds loud in the silent morning in the country, and by the sight of a thick line of trees, the new leaves of which are quivering in the light morning breeze. But it cannot be seen as yet, sunken as it is in the flat plain, although it is swollen by many torrents flowing into it from the eastern hills. When they can see its blue water sparkle through the new greenery on its banks, they are almost on its bank.

«Shall we walk along the bank as far as the bridge, or shall we cross the river here?» they ask Jesus, Who was alone, pensive, and has now stopped waiting for them.

«See if there is a boat to cross over. It is better to cross here...»

«Yes, at the bridge, which is just on the road to Caesarea Paneas, we might come across someone who has been sent to follow our footsteps» remarks Bartholomew frowning, while he looks at Judas.

«No. Don't look back at me. I did not know that we were coming here, and I have not said anything. It was easy to understand that from Saphet Jesus would go to the sepulchres of the rabbis and to Kedesh. But I would never have thought that He wanted to go as far as Philip's capital. So they know nothing about it. So we shall not find them through my fault or through their own

decision. Unless Beelzebub himself leads them» says calmly and humbly the Iscariot.

«Very well. Because with certain people... We must be sharp-sighted and speak very carefully, without letting them have any clue of our plans. We must watch everything. Otherwise our evangelization will become a perpetual flight» replies Bartholomew.

John and Andrew come back. They say: «We found two boats. They will take us to the other side for a drachma each boat. Let us go down the embankment.»

And they cross to the other side in the two little boats, in two trips. There is a fertile plain also on this side, fertile but not thickly populated. Only the local farmers live there.

«H'm! What shall we do for bread? I am hungry. And there are no Philistine ears of corn here... Grass and leaves, leaves and flowers. I am neither a little sheep nor a bee» grumbles Peter to his companions who smile at his remark.

Judas Thaddeus turns round – he was a little ahead – and he says: «We will buy some bread in the next village.»

«Providing they don't make us flee» concludes James of Zebedee.

«You, who say that we have to watch everything, be careful lest you pick up the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees. I think that is what you are doing, without considering the wrong you are doing. Be careful, very careful!» says Jesus.

The apostles look at one another and whisper: «What is He saying? The bread was given to us by the woman of the deaf-mute and by the inn-keeper at Kedesh. I still have it here. It is the only bread we have. And we do not know whether we will be able to find any more to satisfy our hunger. So why does He say that we buy bread of Sadducees and Pharisees with their yeast? Perhaps He does not want us to buy any in the villages here...»

Jesus, Who once again was ahead of them all alone, turns round. «Why are you afraid to be left without bread? Even if all the people here were Sadducees and Pharisees, you would not be without bread, because I told you not to buy any. I am not speaking of the yeast which is in bread. So you can buy bread anywhere you like to satisfy your hunger. And if nobody would sell you any, you would not be left without bread just the same. Do you not remember the five loaves with which five thousand people appeased their hunger? Do you not remember

that you collected twelve baskets full of the scraps remaining? I could do for you, who are twelve and have one loaf, what I did for five thousand people with five loaves. Do you not understand to which yeast I am referring? To the yeast that rises in the hearts of Pharisees, Sadducees and doctors, against Me. *It is hatred. It is heresy.* You are now going towards hatred, as if part of the Pharisaical yeast had entered your hearts. *Not even your enemy is to be hated.* Not even a very small inlet is to be opened to anything that is not God. After the first element, others opposed to God would enter. Sometimes one perishes or is defeated, because *one wants to fight enemies with equal weapons.* And once you have been defeated, you could by contact absorb their doctrine. Be charitable and reserved. You are not yet in a position to oppose such doctrines, without being infected. *Because you have some of their elements as well. And hatred is one of them.* I would also warn you that they may change method in order to entice you and take you away from Me, by being extremely polite, showing that they are repentant and anxious to make peace. You must not avoid them, but when they try to imbue you with their doctrines, you must reject them. That is the yeast to which I was referring. Animosity, which is against love, and false doctrines. I say to you: be prudent.»

«That sign which the Pharisees asked for yesterday, was it “yeast”, Master?» asks Thomas.

«It was yeast and poison.»

«You did the right thing in not giving it to them.»

«But I will give it to them one day.»

«When?» they ask curiously.

«One day...»

«And what sign is it? Are You not telling even us, Your apostles? So that we may recognise it at once» asks Peter who is anxious to know.

«You should not need a sign.»

«Oh! It is not to be able to believe in You! We have not many ideas as the people have. All we want is to love You» says James of Zebedee passionately.

«But the people you approach in a simple friendly way, more than I do, without making them feel uneasy, as I may do, who do they say that I am? And who do they say the Son of Man is?»

«Some say that You are Jesus, that is the Christ, and they are the best. Some say that You are a Prophet, some only a Rabbi, others, and You know, say that You are mad and possessed.»

«But some call You by the same name that You use and they say: “Son of man.”»

«And some say that that is not possible, because the Son of man is a different thing. But that is not always a denial. Because in actual fact they acknowledge that You are more than the Son of man: You are the Son of God. Others instead say that You are not even the Son of man, but a poor man agitated by Satan or deranged by madness. You can thus see that there are many different opinions» says Bartholomew.

«What is the Son of man, therefore, according to the people?»

«He is a man in whom there are all the most beautiful virtues of men, a man gifted with all the requisites of intelligence, wisdom, grace, which we think were in Adam, to which some add the gift of not having to die. You know that there is already a rumour that John the Baptist is not dead. They say that he was only carried elsewhere by angels and that Herod, and above all, Herodias, to prevent people from saying that they had been defeated by God, killed a servant, had him beheaded and then showed his mutilated body saying it was the corpse of the Baptist. People say so many things! So many think that the Son of man is either Jeremiah, or Elijah, or one of the Prophets, or the Baptist, who was gifted with grace and wisdom and said that he was the Precursor of the Christ. Christ: the Anointed of God. The Son of man: a great man, born of man. Some cannot admit, or do not want to admit, that God has sent His Son to the earth. You said so yesterday: “Only those will believe, who are convinced of the infinite goodness of God.” Israel believes more in God's severity than in His goodness...» says Bartholomew again.

«Yes. They feel so undeserving that they consider it impossible that God has been so good as to send His Word to save them. The degraded state of their souls is a hindrance to their believing that» confirms the Zealot. And he adds: «You say that You are the Son of God and of man. In fact in You there is all grace and wisdom as man. And I really think that he who was born of Adam in the state of grace, would have been like You in beauty and intelligence and all virtues. The power of God shines in You. But who can believe that, among those who consider themselves gods and judge God by their standards in their infinite

pride? Cruel, hateful, greedy, impure as they are, they cannot possibly think that God has gone to such an extreme of kindness as to give Himself to redeem them, His love to save them, His generosity to be at their mercy, His purity to sacrifice His life among men. Since they are so inflexible and captious in looking for faults and punishing them, they cannot believe that.»

«And who do you say that I am? Tell Me your own personal opinion, without taking into account My words or the words of other people. If you were compelled to judge Me, who would you say that I am?»

«You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God» exclaims Peter, kneeling down with his arms stretched upwards, towards Jesus, Who looks at him with His face bright with love and Who bends to raise and embrace him, saying:

«Simon, son of Jonah, you are a happy man! Because it was not the flesh and blood that revealed this to you, but My Father in Heaven. Since the first day you came with Me, you have been asking yourself that question, and because you are simple and honest, you have been able to understand and accept the reply that came to you from Heaven. You did not see supernatural manifestations as your brother, John and James did. You did not know My holiness as son, workman, citizen, as My brothers Judas and James did. You did not receive any miracle neither did you see Me work any; I showed no sign of power to you as I did with Philip, Nathanael, Simon Cananean, Thomas and Judas, who saw them. You were not subdued by My will, as Levi the publican was. And yet you exclaimed: “He is the Christ!” You believed since the first moment you saw Me, and your faith was never shaken. That is why I called you Cephas. And that is why on you, Peter, I will build My Church and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you bind on earth, shall be bound also in Heaven. And whatever you loose on the earth shall be loosed also in Heaven, o prudent faithful man, whose heart I have been able to test. And now, from this moment you are the head, to whom obedience and respect are due as to another Myself. And I proclaim him such before all of you.»

If Jesus had crushed Peter under a hailstorm of reproaches, Peter would not have wept so copiously. He is weeping and is shaken by sobs, with his face on Jesus' chest. His weeping can be compared only to the tears he will shed in his grief for denying Jesus. He now weeps for many good humble feelings... A little of the old Simon – the fisherman of Bethsaida who had laughed incredulously and facetiously at his brother's first announcement saying: «Of course, the Messiah

would appear just to you!...» – a good little of the old Simon crumbles under those tears, and from his vanishing frail human nature, Peter appears, more and more clearly, the Pontiff of the Church of Christ.

When he raises his shy embarrassed face, he can make only one gesture to say everything, to promise everything, to strengthen himself completely for his new ministry: he throws his arms round Jesus' neck, compelling Him to bend and kiss him, mingling his somewhat bristly grizzled hair and beard with the soft golden hair and beard of Jesus. And he looks at Jesus with his large, loving, imploring and adoring eyes, still shining and red with tears, holding the Master's ascetic face, bent over his own, in his rough large stumpy hands, as if it were a vase from which a vital liquid flowed... and he drinks kindness, grace, confidence and strength from Jesus' face, eyes and smile...

They separate at last, and resume their journey towards Caesarea Philippi, and Jesus says to everybody: «Peter has spoken the truth. Many guess it, you are aware of it. But for the time being, do not say to anybody who the Christ is, in the full truth known to you. Let God speak to the hearts of people, as He speaks to yours. I solemnly tell you that those who add perfect faith and perfect love to My statements or yours, will learn the true meaning of the words “Jesus, the Christ, the Word, the Son of man and of God.”»

343. At Caesarea Philippi.

28th November 1945.

The town must have been built recently, like Tiberias and Ashkelon. Situated on an inclined plane it culminates in a massive fortress with many towers, flanked with Cyclopean masonry and protected with deep moats into which flows part of the water of two little rivers that first come close together forming an angle, then part, as one runs out of the town and the other flows through it. Beautiful streets, squares, fountains, and buildings in Roman style give to understand that here also servile homage prevailed in Tetrarchs, trampling on all respect for the customs of the Fatherland.

The town is very busy and crowded, probably because it is the junction of important main roads and caravan-tracks for Damascus, Tyre, Saphet and

Tiberias, as indicated on mile-stones at each gate. Pedestrians, horsemen, long caravans of donkeys and camels meet in the wide well-kept streets, and groups of business men or idlers are standing in the squares, under the porches, near the magnificent buildings, perhaps there are also some Thermae, discussing business or in idle conversation.

«Do you know where we can find them?» Jesus asks Peter.

«Yes, I do. Those whom I asked told me that the disciples of the Rabbi meet for their meals in the house of some faithful Israelites, near the citadel. And they described the house to me. I cannot go wrong: it is a Jewish house also on the outside, the front has no windows and there is a high main door with spy-hole, on the side of the wall there is a little fountain, the high walls of the garden extend on two sides along two lanes, and there is a roof-terrace with many doves.»

«Very well. Let us go then.»

They cross the whole town as far as the citadel. They arrive at the house they are looking for, and knock. The wrinkled face of an old woman appears at the peep-hole.

Jesus moves forward and greets her: «Peace be with you, woman. Have the disciples of the Rabbi come back?»

«No, man. They are at the “Great Spring” with other people who have come from many towns on the other side of the river looking for the Rabbi. They are all waiting for Him. Are You waiting for Him as well?»

«No. I am looking for the disciples.»

«Well, look: see that street which is almost opposite the fountain? Take that one and go up until You arrive in front of a massive wall of rock, from which water comes out and flows into a kind of vat and then becomes a little stream. You will find them there. But have You come from far? Do You want to come in and refresh Yourself and wait for them here? If You wish so, I will call my masters. They are good Israelites, You know? And they believe in the Messiah. They are disciples although they have only seen Him once in Jerusalem, in the Temple. But now the disciples of the Messiah have taught them and have worked miracles here, because...»

«Very well, good woman. I will come back later with the disciples. Peace to

you. You may go back to your housework» says Jesus kindly but firmly to stop the avalanche of words.

They resume walking and the younger apostles laugh wholeheartedly at the performance of the woman and they make Jesus smile as well.

«Master» says John «I thought that she was the “Great Spring”. Don't You think so? She poured out continuous waves of words and treated us as vats that become streams because they are full of words...»

«Yes. I hope that the disciples have not worked a miracle on her tongue... We would have to say: you have worked too big a miracle» says Thaddeus, who contrary to his habit, laughs heartily.

«There will be fun when we go back and she finds out who the Master is! Who will be able to keep her quiet then?» asks James of Zebedee.

«No, she will be so shocked that she will become dumb» says Matthew, joining in the conversation of the younger ones.

«I will praise the Most High, if astonishment paralyses her tongue. It is probably because I have not had any breakfast yet, but the flood of her words certainly made me feel dizzy» says Peter.

«And how she shouted! Is she perhaps deaf?» asks Thomas.

«No. She thought we were deaf» replies the Iscariot.

«Leave the poor old woman alone! She is good and a believer. Her heart is as generous as her tongue» says Jesus half-seriously.

«Oh! Master! In that case the old woman is so generous that she is heroic» says John laughing heartily.

The calcareous rocky wall can now be seen and the gurgle of the water falling into the vat is heard.

«There is the stream. Let us follow it... There is the spring... and there... Benjamin! Daniel! Abel! Philip! Ermasteus! We are here! The Master is here!» shouts John to a large group of men gathered round someone who, however, is not visible.

«Be quiet, boy, or you will be like that old hen» suggests Peter.

The disciples have turned round. They have seen: and to see and rush down

from the terrace is all one thing. Now that the group has opened out, I can see that people from Kedesh and from the village of the deaf-mute have joined the many disciples, who are all seniors by now. They must have taken more direct routes, because they have preceded the Master.

Their joy is great. Their questions and answers are numerous. Jesus listens and replies patiently until thin Isaac appears smiling, laden with supplies, together with two more people.

«Let us go to the hospitable house, my Lord. And when there You will be able to explain to us what we have not been able to clarify, because we do not know it ourselves... These people here, the last arrivals – they have been with us only a few hours – want to know what the sign of Jonah is, the one You promised to give this wicked generation that persecutes You» says Isaac.

«I will explain it to them while going...»

Going! It is not so easy! Like bees attracted by the scent of flowers that has spread in the air, people rush from all directions to join those who are around Jesus.

«They are our friends» explains Isaac. «People who have believed and have been waiting for You...»

«People who have received graces from the disciples and from him in particular» shouts one in the crowd pointing at Isaac.

Isaac blushes and as if he wanted to apologise he says: «But I am a servant. He is the Master. Here is the Master, for Whom you have been waiting. Here is Jesus!»

It was the last straw! The peaceful district of Caesarea, a little out of the way, in the suburb area, becomes busier than a market. And noisier. Hosannas! Acclamations! Entreaties! Everything!

Jesus proceeds very slowly, hemmed in on all sides by so much love. But He smiles and blesses. He proceeds so slowly that some people have time to run away and spread the news, and then come Lack with friends or relatives, holding their children high up in order to arrive safely close to Jesus, Who caresses and blesses them.

They thus arrive at the house seen previously and knock. The same old servant, on hearing all the voices, opens without any hesitation. But... she sees Jesus in

the middle of the cheering crowd, and she understands... She drops to the floor moaning: «Have mercy, my Lord. Your servant did not recognise You and did not worship You!»

«No harm, woman. You did not recognise the man, but you believed in Him. That is what is required to be loved by God. Stand up and take Me to your masters.»

The old woman obeys, trembling with respect. But she sees her masters, overwhelmed with respect, leaning against the wall at the end of the rather dark entrance-hall. She points at them: «There they are.»

«Peace to you and to this house. May the Lord bless you for your faith in the Christ and for your charity to His disciples» says Jesus going towards the two old people, who are either husband and wife, or brother and sister.

They worship Him and then take Him to the wide verandah where several tables are laid under a heavy velarium. The view stretches over Caesarea as far as the mountains behind it and on its sides. Doves fly from the terrace to the garden full of trees in blossom.

While an old servant adds more places to the tables, Isaac explains: «Benjamin and Anne welcome not only us, but whoever comes looking for You. They do so in Your Name.»

«May Heaven bless them every time they do so.»

«Oh! We have means, but have no children. At the end of our days, we are adopting the poor of the Lord» says simply the old woman.

And Jesus lays His hand on her grey-haired head saying: «And that makes you mother more than if you had conceived seven times and seven times. But now allow Me to explain to these people what they wanted to know, so that we can then dismiss them and sit down to our meal.»

The terrace is crammed with people and more continue to arrive taking up every possible bit of room. Jesus is surrounded by children who look at Him ecstatically with their large innocent eyes. His back is turned to the table and He smiles at the children even when talking of the important subject. He seems to be reading on their innocent faces the words of the requested truth.

«Listen. The sign of Jonah that I promised to the wicked, and I promise to you as well, not because you are wicked, on the contrary, that you may reach

perfection in believing when you see that it is accomplished, is this.

As Jonah remained in the belly of the sea-monster for three days and then was vomited on the shore to convert and save Nineveh, so it will happen to the Son of man. To calm the billows of a great satanic storm, the mighty ones in Israel will deem it necessary to sacrifice the Innocent. But they will only increase their dangers, because in addition to Satan who will perturb them, they will have God Who will punish them after the crime. They could defeat the storm by believing in Me. But they will not believe, because they see in Me the cause of their perturbation, of their fears, dangers and refutation of their false holiness. But when the hour comes, the insatiable monster, that is, the bowels of the earth, which swallow every man who dies, will open up to give the Light back to the world that denied it.

So as Jonah was a sign of the power and mercy of the Lord for the people of Nineveh, so the Son of man will be the sign for this generation. With the difference that Nineveh was converted whereas Jerusalem will not be converted, because it is full of the wicked generation of which I spoke. So the Queen of the South will rise on Doomsday against the men of this generation and will condemn them. Because she came, in her days, from the end of the world to listen to Solomon's wisdom, whilst this generation, which has Me with them, will not listen to Me and they persecute and drive Me away as if I were a leper and a sinner, and yet I am much greater than Solomon. Also the people of Nineveh will rise on Doomsday against the wicked generation that will not turn to the Lord its God, because they were converted by the preaching of a man.

And I am greater than any man, be it Jonah or any other Prophet. I will therefore give the sign of Jonah to those who ask for a definitely unequivocal sign. I will give one and one sign to those who arrogantly refuse to bow to the proofs that I have already given them of people rising from death by My command. I will give all signs. The sign of a decomposed body that becomes alive and wholesome, and the sign of a Body that rises by Itself from death because Its Spirit is gifted with almighty power. But they will not be graces. They will not smooth the situation. Neither here, nor in the eternal books. What is written, is written. And proofs will pile up, like stones for a lapidation. They will pile up against Me, to harm Me, but unsuccessfully. And against them to crush them forever by the sentence of God reserved for the wicked incredulous.

That is the sign of Jonah of which I spoke. Have you any more questions to ask Me?»

«No, Master. We will inform our head of the synagogue, who was very close to the truth when considering the promised sign.»

«Matthias is a just man. And the Truth is revealed to the just as it is revealed to these innocent children who know Who I am, better than anybody else. Before I dismiss you, let Me hear these angels of the earth praise the mercy of God. Come here, children.»

The children who have been quiet with some difficulty so far, run towards Him. «Tell Me, children without malice, which is My sign for you?»

«That You are good.»

«That You cured my mother by means of Your Name.»

«That You love everybody.»

«That You are so handsome as no other man can be.»

«That You make bad people become good, as You did with my father.»

Each child announces a loving distinctive feature of Jesus, or recollects sufferings that Jesus has changed into smiles.

But the dearest of them all is a lively little child, about four years old, who climbs up on Jesus' lap and clasps His neck saying: «Your sign is that You love all children, and children love You. A love big like that...» and he opens his little plump arms wide, and laughs, and he then embraces Jesus' neck once again, rubbing his childish cheek against Jesus', Who kisses him asking: «But why do you love Me if you have never seen Me before?»

«Because You look like the angel of the Lord.»

«But you have not seen him, My dear little fellow...» says Jesus tempting him and smiling.

The child remains dumbfounded for a moment. He then smiles displaying all his little teeth and he says: «But my soul did see him! Mummy says that I have it, and it's here, and God sees it, and my soul has seen God and the angels, and sees them. And my soul knows You, because You are the Lord.»

Jesus kisses his forehead saying: «May this kiss increase in you the light of your intellect» and He puts him down. The child runs to his father, holding a hand on his forehead where it was kissed, and he shouts: «To mummy, to mummy! So that she may kiss here, where the Lord kissed, and her voice will come back to her and she will not weep any more.»

They explain to Jesus that the child's mother suffers from throat trouble and was very anxious to receive a miracle; but the disciples were unable to cure her disease as it was too deep and untouchable.

«The youngest disciple, her little boy, will cure her. Go in peace, man. And have faith... like your son» He says dismissing the child's father.

He then kisses the other children who are anxious to have the same kiss on their foreheads and He dismisses the citizens. Only His disciples, the people from Kedesh and the other places remain with Him.

While waiting for the meal to be served, Jesus organises the departure of the following day of all the disciples, who will precede Him to Capernaum, where they will join the others who will have gone there from other places. «You will then take with you Salome, the wives and daughters of Nathanael and Philip, Johanna and Susanna, as you proceed towards Nazareth. You will get My Mother there, and the mother of My brothers and you will take them to Bethany, to the house in which Joseph lives, in Lazarus' property. We will come through the Decapolis.»

«And what about Marjiam?» asks Peter.

«I said: “you will precede Me to Capernaum.” I did not say: go. But from Capernaum you will be able to inform the women of our arrival, so that they may be ready, when we go towards Jerusalem via the Decapolis. Marjiam, who is now a young man, will go with the disciples escorting the women...»

«The fact is... that I wanted to take also my wife, poor woman, to Jerusalem. She has always wanted to go, but she never came, because I did not want any trouble. But I would like to make her happy this year. She is so good!»

«Of course, Simon. That is another reason for sending Marjiam with her. We shall travel very slowly and we shall all meet there...»

The old landlord says: «Such a short time with me?»

«Father, I have still so much to do. I want to be in Jerusalem at least eight days before Passover. Remember that the first phase of the moon of Adar is already over...»

«That is true. But I longed so much for You!... I seem to be in the light of Heaven with You here... and that the light will go out as soon as You go away.»

«No, father. I will leave it in your heart. I will leave it also to your wife and to everybody in this hospitable house.»

They sit at the tables and Jesus offers and blesses the food, which a servant passes to the various tables.

344. At the Castle in Caesarea Paneas.

29th November 1945.

The meal in the hospitable house is over. And Jesus goes out with the Twelve, His disciples and the old landlord. They go back to the Great Spring. But they do not stop there. They continue along the same road, which is uphill all the way, northwards.

The road, although very steep, is comfortable, because it is manageable also to carts and horses. At the end of it, on the top of the mountain, there is a massive castle or fortress, whichever it may be, and it is amazing because of its peculiar shape. It seems to consist of two buildings, placed at different levels, so that the rear one, which is also more warlike looking, is a few metres higher than the front one, which it dominates and defends. Between the two buildings there is a high broad wall fortified with square squat towers; but it must be one building only because it is surrounded by an ashlar wall, with slanting ashlar at the base to support the weight of the rampart. I cannot see the western side. But the northern and southern sides fall sheer down to the mountain, which is isolated and drops vertically on both sides. I think that the western side is similar.

Old Benjamin, who, like all of us, is proud of his town, explains the importance of the Tetrarch's castle, which besides being a castle, is also a fortress for the town, and he points out its beauty, its Powerful solidity, its attributes such as cisterns, vats, space, wide view all around, position etc. «Also the Romans say that it is beautiful. And they are good judges!... » concludes the old man. He then adds: «I am familiar with the superintendent. That's why I can go in. I will show you the widest and most beautiful view of Palestine.»

Jesus listens to him kindly. The others smile faintly: they have seen so many views... but the old man is so kind that they have not the heart to mortify him

and they countenance him in his desire to show beautiful things to Jesus.

They reach the summit. The view is really magnificent even from the emplacement before the main iron gate. But the old man says: «Come... come!... It is more beautiful inside. We will go to the top of the highest tower in the citadel... You will see...»

And they enter a dark corridor dug in the wall, which is several metres wide, until they reach a yard where the superintendent is waiting for them with his family.

The two friends greet each other and the old man explains the reason for the visit.

«The Rabbi of Israel?! What a pity that Philip is not here. He was so anxious to see Him, because we heard of His fame. He is very fond of true rabbis, because they are the only ones who defended his rights, and also to spite Antipas who does not like them. Come, come!...» The man eyed Jesus very carefully first and then decided to honour Him by giving Him a bow worthy of a king.

They go through another corridor into a second yard where there is another iron postern admitting to a third yard, beyond which there is a deep moat and the turreted wall of the citadel. Faces of curious warriors and batmen appear from everywhere. They enter the citadel and then, climbing a narrow staircase, they reach the bastion and then a tower. Only Jesus, the superintendent, Benjamin and the Twelve enter the tower, and they are packed like sardines, so the others cannot go in and they remain on the bastion.

Jesus and those who are with Him enjoy a superb view when they go out on the little terrace at the top of the tower and look over the high stone parapet! Leaning out over the abyss on this western side, the highest part of the castle, they can see the whole of Caesarea stretched out at the foot of the mountain, and they can see it very well, because it is not on level ground, but on gentle slopes. Beyond Caesarea there is a fertile plain that extends as far as lake Merom. And it looks like a little green sea, the water of which sparkles like light turquoises, strewn over the green expanse like particles of clear sky. And then there are beautiful hills, spread here and there at the borders of the plain, like necklaces of dark emerald streaked with the silver of olive-trees. And airy plumes of trees in blossom, or trees in blossom as compact as huge balls... And looking to the north and the east there is the powerful Lebanon and the Hermon shining in the sun with its pearly snow and the mountains of Ituraea; and one can catch a

glimpse of the imposing Jordan valley, enclosed between the hills of the sea of Tiberias and the mountains of Gaulanitis, fading away in the distance like a dream.

«How beautiful! It is very beautiful!» exclaims Jesus admiring the view and He seems to be blessing or to be wishing to embrace these beautiful places by opening His arms wide and smiling joyfully. And He replies to the apostles asking for this or that elucidation, pointing out the places where they have already been, that is to the various regions and the directions in which they lie.

«But I cannot see the Jordan» says Bartholomew.

«You cannot see it, but it is over there, in that expanse, between the two chains of mountains. The river is immediately beyond the western one. We will be going down there, because Perea and the Decapolis are still awaiting the Evangelizer.»

But He turns round, as if He were listening to the air, because of a long choked wailing that He has heard more than once. He looks at the superintendent, as if to ask him what is happening.

«It is one of the women of the castle. A young wife. She is about to have a baby. It will be her first and last one because her husband died at the beginning of the month of Chislev. I do not know whether she will live, because since her husband died, she has been doing nothing but melt into tears. She has worn herself to a shadow. Can You hear her? She has not even got the strength to cry... Of course... A widow at seventeen years... And they were very fond of each other. My wife and my mother-in-law keep saying to her: “You will find your Toby in your son.” But they are just words...»

They come down from the tower and go round the bastions admiring the place and the view. The superintendent then insists in offering the guests some fruit and drinks and they enter a large room in the front of the castle, to which the servants bring what has been ordered.

The moaning becomes more heart-rending and is closer, and the superintendent apologises also because the incident keeps his wife away from the Master. But a cry, which is even more painful than the previous moaning, is now heard and hands carrying fruit or cups to mouths are left mid air.

«I am going to see what happened» says the superintendent. And he goes out while the painful noise of cries and weeping is heard more distinctly through the

half-open door.

The superintendent comes back: «The baby died as soon as it was born... What a torture! She is trying to revive it with her failing strength... But it does not breathe any more. It is purple!...» and shaking his head he says: «Poor Dorca!»

«Bring Me the baby.»

«But it is dead, Lord.»

«Bring Me the baby, I said. As it is. And tell the mother to have faith.»

The superintendent runs away. He comes back: «She does not want to give it. She says that she will not give it to anybody. She seems to be mad. She says that we are trying to take it away from her.»

«Take Me to the door of her room, so that she may see Me.»

«But...»

«Never mind! I will be purified later, if necessary...»

They go quickly along a dark corridor as far as a closed room. Jesus Himself opens the door and remains on the threshold facing the bed on which a very pale woman is pressing to her heart a little baby giving no sign of life.

«Peace to you, Dorca. Look at Me. Do not weep. I am the Saviour. Give Me your baby...»

I do not know what there is in Jesus' voice. I know that the poor wretch, as soon as she sees Him, clasps the new-born baby to her heart in a wild attitude, then she looks at Him and her distressed countenance changes and becomes sorrowful but hopeful at the same time. She hands the baby enveloped in linen swaddling bands to the superintendent's wife... and remains motionless, with her hands stretched out, with her wide eyes full of faith and life, deaf to the entreaties of her mother-in-law, who would like her to lie down on the bed pillows.

Jesus takes the bundle of swaddling clothes containing the half cold child, holds it straight by its armpits, lays His lips on the little half-closed lips of the baby, bending a little because the little head is leaning back. He blows hard down the inert throat... and remains for a moment with His lips pressed against the little mouth... then moves away... and a chirping trembles in the still air... then a louder one... a third one... and finally a real cry from a little quivering head... The baby moves its hands and feet and in the meantime during its long

triumphant cry, its bald head and tiny face begin to colour. And its mother asserts: «My son! My love! The offspring of my Toby! On my heart! Come to my heart!... that I may die a happy death...» she murmurs, dropping her voice to a whisper, which ends in a kiss and in an understandable reaction of relaxation.

«She is dying!» shout the women.

«No. She is beginning to rest, as she deserves. When she wakes up tell her to call the baby: Jesai Tobias. I will see her at the Temple on the day of her purification. Goodbye. Peace be with you.» He slowly closes the door and turns round to go back to His disciples. But they are all there, deeply moved at what they have seen and looking at Him full of admiration.

They go back together to the yard. They say goodbye to the dumbfounded superintendent, who keeps repeating: «How sorry the Tetrarch will be that he was not here!» and they begin to descend towards the town.

Jesus lays His hand on the shoulder of old Benjamin saying: «Thank you for what you have shown to us and for being the occasion for a miracle.»...

345. Jesus Predicts His Passion for the First Time. Peter is Reproached.

30th November 1945.

Jesus must have left the town of Caesarea Philippi at daybreak, because the town is now far behind with its mountains, and Jesus is once again in the plain going towards lake Merom, from where He will go to the lake of Gennesaret. His apostles are with Him together with all the disciples who were at Caesarea. But no one is surprised to see such a numerous caravan on the road, because there are many more caravans of Israelites or proselytes going to Jerusalem from all parts of the Diaspora, as they wish to remain some time in the Holy City to listen to the rabbis and breathe the air of the Temple for a long time.

They proceed quickly but although the sun is already high in the sky, it is not troublesome, as springtime sunshine gently warms new leaves of trees in blossom and makes flowers open everywhere. The plain before the lake is like a flowery carpet, and the pilgrims looking at the hills surrounding it see them

spotted with white, rosy, pink or almost red blossoms of the various fruit-trees, or on passing near the houses of farmers or forges on the roadside, they enjoy the sight of the first rose-bushes full of flowers in gardens, along hedges or against the walls of houses.

«Johanna's gardens must be all in flower» remarks Simon Zealot.

«Also the garden in Nazareth must look like a basket full of flowers. Mary is the sweet bee that passes from one rose-bush to another, then to the jasmines, which will soon be blooming, to the lilies, which are already in bud, and She will pick a branch of the almond-tree, as She is wont to do, nay, She may pick a branch of the pear-tree or of the pomegranate, to put it into the amphora in Her little room. When we were young boys, every year we used to ask Her: “Why do You always have a flowery branch there, and You do not put the early roses in it?.” And She replied: “Because on those petals I can see an order written, which came to Me from God and I smell the pure scent of celestial air.” Do you remember, Judas?» James of Alphaeus asks his brother.

«Yes. I do. And I remember that when I grew up, I used to wait anxiously for springtime, so that I could see Mary walking in Her garden, under Her trees, the blossoms of which were like clouds, or among the bushes of the early roses. I never saw anything more beautiful than the eternal girl passing lightly among Her flowers while doves were flying around Her...»

«Oh! Let us go to Her soon, Lord! That I may see all that as well!» implores Thomas.

«All we need do is quicken our steps and rest less, at night, to arrive in Nazareth in good time» replies Jesus.

«Will You really take me there, Lord?»

«Yes, Thomas, I will. We shall all go to Bethsaida and then to Capernaum, where we shall part. We shall proceed to Tiberias by boat and then to Nazareth. Thus, with the exception of you Judaeans, we shall all be able to get lighter garments, as winter is now over.»

«Yes. And we shall go and say to the Dove: “Rise, make haste, my beloved one, and come, for winter is past, the rains are over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth... Rise, my friend, and come, my dove hiding in the clefts of the rock, show me your face, let me hear your voice.”»

«Well done, John! You sound like a sweetheart singing a song to his girl!» says Peter.

«I am. I am full of love for Mary. I will never see other women excite my love. Except Mary, Whom I love with my whole self.»

«I said the same a month ago, didn't I, Lord?» says Thomas.

«I think that we are all full of love for Her. Such a noble celestial love!... As only that Donna can inspire. And our souls love Her soul completely, our minds love and admire Her intelligence, our eyes admire and delight in Her pure grace, which gives joy without any anxiety, as when one looks at a flower... Mary, the Beauty of the earth, and, I think, the Beauty of Heaven...» says Matthew.

«That is true! We all see in Mary what is sweetest in women: the pure girl, and the most sweet mother. And we do not know whether we love Her more for the former or the latter grace...» says Philip.

«We love Her because She is “Mary.” That's it!» remarks Peter.

Jesus has been listening to them and He says: «You have all spoken very well. Simon Peter is quite right: one loves Mary because She is “Mary.” On our way to Caesarea I told you that only those who join perfect faith to perfect love will be successful in understanding the true meaning of the words: “Jesus, the Christ, the Word, the Son of God and the Son of man.” But I can now tell you that there is another name full of meaning. And it is the name of My Mother. Only those who add perfect faith to perfect love will succeed in understanding the true meaning of the name “Mary”, of the Mother of the Son of God. And the true meaning will begin to appear clearly to the true faithful and loving ones in a dreadful hour of torture, when the Mother is to be tortured with Her Son, when She co-redeems with the Redeemer, in the eyes of the whole world and forever and ever.»

«When?» asks Bartholomew, while they stop by the side of a large stream where many disciples drink.

«Let us stop here and eat our bread. It is midday. We shall be at lake Merom by evening and we shall be able to get boats and shorten our journey» replies Jesus evasively.

They all sit down on the tender grass on the bank of the stream, in the warm sunshine, and John says: «It is a pity to spoil these little flowers, which are so

gentle. They look like little bits of the sky, which have fallen here, on these meadows.» There are hundreds and hundreds of myosotis.

«They will grow more beautifully tomorrow. They have bloomed to turn the earth into a dining room for their Lord» says his brother James to comfort him.

Jesus offers and blesses the food and they all eat happily. All the disciples, like sunflowers, are looking at Jesus, Who sat in the center of the row of His apostles.

The meal is soon over, it was made tasty by serenity and pure water. As Jesus remains sitting, no one moves. The disciples move a little to come closer and hear what Jesus is saying to the apostles who have asked Him questions on what He said before about His Mother.

«Yes. Because it would be a great thing indeed to be My Mother according to the flesh. You must consider that Anne of Elkanah is remembered as Samuel's mother. And he was only a prophet. And yet his mother is mentioned because she bore him. Thus, Mary would be remembered with the greatest praise, for giving Jesus, the Savior, to the world. But it would be too little, as compared with what God exacts from Her to fill the measure required for the redemption of the world. Mary will not disappoint God's desire. She has never disappointed Him. She has given and will give Herself completely both with regard to requests of total love and to those of total sacrifice. And when She has accomplished the supreme sacrifice, with Me and for Me, and for the world, then the true faithful and loving believers will understand the real meaning of Her Name. And forever in the future, each true faithful and Loving believer will be granted to know it. The Name of the Great Mother, of the Holy Nurse, Who will nourish all the children of Christ with Her tears, to bring them up for the Life in Heaven.»

«Tears, Lord? Must Your Mother weep?» asks the Iscariot.

«Every mother weeps. And Mine will weep more than any other.»

«Why? I made mine weep sometimes, because I have not always been a good son. But You! You never grieve Your Mother.»

«No. I do not grieve Her as Her Son. But I will deeply distress Her as Redeemer. There are two who will make My Mother weep endless tears: I, to save Mankind, Mankind by its continuous sinning. Every man who has lived, is living or will live, costs Mary tears.»

«Why?» asks James of Zebedee, who is obviously astonished.

«Because every man costs Me suffering to redeem him.»

«But how can You say that with regard to those who are already dead or not yet born? The living, the scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees may make You suffer through their charges against You, their jealousy, their wickedness. But nothing more than that» states Bartholomew confidently.

«John the Baptist was also killed... and he is not the only prophet killed by Israel, or the only priest of the eternal Will, killed because he was disliked by those who disobeyed God.»

«But You are greater than a prophet than the Baptist himself, Your Precursor. You are the Word of God. The hand of Israel will not rise against You» says Judas Thaddeus.

«Do you think so, brother? You are wrong» replies Jesus.

«No. It cannot be! That cannot happen! God will not allow it! It would be a perpetual humiliation of His Christ!» Judas Thaddeus is so excited that he stands up.

Jesus also stands up and stares at his pale face and sincere eyes. He says slowly: «And yet, it will happen» and He lowers His right arm, which He had raised, as if He were swearing an oath.

They all stand up and press closer round Him: a circle of sad incredulous faces; voices can be heard whispering: «Of course... if it were really so... Thaddeus would be right.»

«What happened to the Baptist was wrong. But it extolled the man, a hero till the very last. If instead it should happen to the Christ, it would diminish His fame.»

«Christ can be persecuted, but not humiliated.»

«The unction of God is upon Him.»

«Who would continue to believe in You, if they saw You at the mercy of men?»

«We will not allow that.»

James of Alphaeus is the only one who makes no comment. His brother chides him: «Are you not saying anything? Are you not reacting? Have you not heard? Defend the Christ against Himself!»

James does not reply, but he covers his face with his hands and moves aside weeping.

«He is a fool!» utters his brother.

«Perhaps not such a fool as you think» replies Ermasteus. And he goes on: «Yesterday, when explaining the prophecy, the Master spoke of a decomposed body that is recomposed and of a body that will rise from death by itself. I think that one cannot rise again, unless one dies first.»

«But one may die a natural death, or die of old age. And even that would be too much for the Christ!» retorts Thaddeus, and many say that he is right.

«Yes, but in that case, it would not be a sign given to this generation, which is much older than He is» remarks Simon Zealot.

«Of course not. But He did not necessarily speak of Himself» retorts Thaddeus, who is obstinate in his love and respect.

«No one, but the Son of God can rise by oneself from the dead, as no one but the Son of God can be born as He was born. I maintain that, as I saw the glory of His birth» says Isaac as a fully confident witness.

Jesus has been listening to them, looking at each while he was speaking, with His arms folded on His chest. He now makes a gesture that He wants to speak and He says: «The Son of man will be handed over into the power of men because He is the Son of God, *but He is also the Redeemer of man. And there is no redemption without suffering.* My body, flesh and blood will suffer, to make amends for the sins of the flesh and of the blood. I will suffer morally to make amends for the sins of intentions and passions. And I will suffer spiritually for the sins of souls. My suffering will be complete. Therefore at the appointed time I will be captured in Jerusalem and after suffering grievously at the hands of the Elders and High Pontiffs, of the scribes and Pharisees, I will be sentenced to disgraceful death. And God will let them do so, because it must be so, *as I am the Lamb Who is to expiate the sins of the whole world.* And in deepest anguish, which My Mother and few more people will share with Me, I will die on the scaffold, and three days later, exclusively through My own divine will, I will rise again to eternal glorious life *as Man and once again I will be God in Heaven with the Father and the Spirit.* But I must first suffer all infamy and My heart is to be pierced by Falsehood and Hatred.»

A chorus of scandalized shouts spreads through the warm scented springtime

air.

Peter, who is also daunted and scandalized, takes Jesus by the arm and pulls Him aside and whispers in His ear: «Oh! Lord! Don't say that. It's not right. See? They are scandalized. You lose their esteem. On no account You must allow that; in any case such a thing will never happen. So why speak of it as something real? You must rise higher and higher in the eyes of men, if You want to assert Your authority, and eventually end by working a last miracle, such as crushing Your enemies. But You must never lower Yourself to the level of a punished criminal.» And Peter looks like a master or a sorrowful father kindly reproaching a son who has said something silly.

Jesus, Who was lightly bent to hear Peter's whispering, straightens Himself up and with a severe countenance and eyes blazing with anger, He shouts so that everybody may hear Him and learn the lesson: «Go away from Me, as you are now Satan advising Me to disobey My Father! *But that is why I came!* Not to be honored! *By advising Me to be proud, disobedient and uncharitably severe, you are spurring Me to evil things.* Go away! You are scandalising Me! *Do you not understand that greatness does not lie in honors, but in sacrifice and that it is of no importance to be considered worms by men, if God considers us angels?* You, foolish man, understand neither God's greatness nor His reasons, and you see, judge, feel and speak according to what is purely human.»

Poor Peter is crushed by the severe reproach and feeling humiliated he moves aside and weeps... But his tears are not the tears of joy of a few days ago. He weeps his heart out because he realizes that he has sinned and has grieved the person whom he loves. And Jesus lets him weep. He takes off His sandals, pulls His clothes up and wades the stream.

The others follow Him silently. No one dare say a word. Poor Peter is the last in the group and in vain Isaac and the Zealot endeavor to console him.

Andrew turns round several times to look at him and then whispers something to John, who is utterly depressed. But John shakes his head in denial. Andrew then makes up his mind. He runs forward and reaches Jesus. He calls Him in a low trembling voice: «Master! Master!...»

Jesus lets him call several times. At last He turns round and with a severe countenance He asks: «What do you want?»

«Master, my brother is distressed... he is weeping...»

«He deserved it.»

«That is true, Master. But he is a man... One can make mistakes when speaking.»

«In fact what he said today was quite wrong» replies Jesus. But He is not quite so severe now and the sparkle of a smile mitigates His divine eyes.

Andrew takes heart again and redoubles his efforts in favor of his brother. «But You are just and You know that he erred through his love for You...»

«Love must be light, not darkness. He turned it into darkness and bandaged his soul with it.»

«That is true, Lord. But bandages can be removed if one wants. It is not as if the spirit itself were in darkness. Bandages are the outside. The spirit is the inside, the living nucleus... The inside of my brother is good.»

«Well, let him remove the bandages that he put on it.»

«He will certainly do so, Lord! He is already doing it. If You turn round You will see how disfigured his face is by tears, which You are not comforting. Why are You so severe with him?»

«Because it is his duty to be the “first”, as I gave him the honor to be so. He who received much, must give much...»

«Oh! Lord! Yes, that is true. But do You not remember Mary of Lazarus? Or John of Endor? Or Aglae? Or the Beautiful woman of Korazim? Or Levi? You gave them everything... and they had only shown You their intention of being redeemed... Lord!... You heard my entreaties on behalf of the Beautiful woman of Korazim and of Aglae... Would You not listen to my entreaties on behalf of Your Simon and mine, who erred through his love for You?»

Jesus looks at His mild apostle who has become bold and insistent in favor of his brother, as he was silently insistent for the beautiful woman of Korazim and Aglae, and His face shines brightly: «Go and call your brother» He says «and bring him here.»

«Oh! Thank You, my Lord! I will go at once...» and he runs away as swiftly as a swallow.

«Come, Simon. The Master is no longer angry with you. Come, because He wants to tell you.»

«No. I am ashamed... He rebuked me only a little while ago... He wants me to reproach me again...»

«How little you know Him! Come on! Do you think that I would take you to Him to make you suffer again? I would not insist if I were not sure that a great joy is expecting you there. Come.»

«But what shall I tell Him?» Peter asks, setting out somewhat reluctantly: he is restrained by his human nature, but at the same time he is urged by his soul that cannot bear to be without Jesus' condescension and love. «What shall I say to Him?» he continues to ask.

«Nothing! Show Him your face and that will be sufficient» his brother says encouraging him.

All the disciples, as the two brothers overtake them, look at them smiling, as they understand what is happening.

They arrive where Jesus is. But at the last moment Peter stops. Andrew wastes no time. With a strong push, as he is wont to do when driving his boat into the lake, he hurls him forward. Jesus stops... Peter raises his face... Jesus lowers His... They look at each other... Two large tears stream down Peter's flushed cheeks...

«Come here, My big rash boy, that I may act as a father and wipe your tears» says Jesus, and He raises the hand on which the scar made by the stone at Giscala is still visible and with His fingers He wipes the two tears.

«Oh! Lord! Have You forgiven me?» asks Peter: in a trembling voice, taking Jesus' hand in his own and looking at Him with loving imploring eyes, as a faithful dog that wants to be forgiven by its angry master.

«I never condemned you...»

«But before...»

«I loved you. It is love not to allow deviations of sentiments and wisdom to strike root in you. You must be the first in everything, Simon Peter.»

«So... so, You still love me? You still want me with You? Not because I want to be the first, You know. I am happy to be even the last one, providing I am with You, at Your service... and I die at your service, Lord, my God!»

Jesus puts His hand round Peter's shoulders and draws him close to Himself.

And Peter, who has been holding the other hand of Jesus all the time, smothers it with kisses... He is happy and whispers: «How much I suffered!... Thank You, Jesus.»

«You had better thank your brother. And in the future make sure you carry your burden with justice and heroism. Let us wait for the others. Where are they?»

They are standing where they were when Peter reached Jesus, to leave the Master free to speak to His mortified apostle. Jesus beckons them to come forward. With them there is a little group of peasants, who had left the work in the fields to come and speak to the disciples.

Jesus, still resting His hand on Peter's shoulder, says: «After what has happened, you have understood that it is a grave matter to be at My service. I reproached him. But My reproach applies to all of you. Because the same thoughts were in most of your hearts, either fully developed or in germ. I have thus demolished them for you, and he who still cherishes them proves that he does not understand My Doctrine, My Mission or My Person.

I have come to be Way, Truth and Life. I give you the Truth through My teaching. I mark out the road, I point it out and level it for you through My sacrifice. But I give Life to you through My Death. And remember that whoever answers My call and follows Me to cooperate in the redemption of the world must be prepared to die to give Life to other people. Thus, whoever wants to follow me must be prepared to deny himself, his old self with its passions, inclinations, customs, traditions and thoughts, and follow Me with his new self.

Let every man take his cross, as I will take Mine. He must take it even if it looks too defamatory to him. He must let the weight of his cross crush his human self to free his spiritual self, which the cross does not fill with horror. On the contrary it is a support and an object of veneration because the spirit knows and remembers. And let him follow Me with his cross. And at the end of his life will an ignominious death be waiting for him, as it is waiting for Me?

It does not matter. He must not grieve over that, on the contrary let him rejoice, because *the ignominy of the earth will change into a great glory in Heaven, whereas it will be dishonorable to act in a cowardly way in front of spiritual heroism.*

You always state that you are prepared to follow Me and face death with Me. Follow Me, then, and I will lead you to the Kingdom along a hard but holy

glorious road, at the end of which you will attain the immutable Life forever. That is "to live." To follow instead, the ways of the world and of the flesh is "to die." So he who wants to save his life on the earth will lose it, whereas he who loses his life on the earth for My sake and for the sake of My Gospel, will save it. But remember: of what avail will it be to man to conquer the whole world, if he loses his soul?

And be very careful, both now and in future, not to be ashamed of My words and My deeds. To do so, would be "to die" as well. Because he who is ashamed of Me and of My words among this stupid, adulterous, sinful generation, of which I spoke to you, and in the hope of gaining protection and profit flatters it denying Me and My Doctrine and throwing My words to the foul mouths of pigs and dogs – the recompense of which will be excrement and not money – will be judged by the Son of Man, when He comes in the glory of His Father with angels and saints to judge the world. I will then be ashamed of those adulterers and fornicators, of those cowards and usurers and will expel them from His Kingdom, because in the celestial Jerusalem there is no room for adulterers, cowards, fornicators, blasphemers and thieves. And I solemnly tell you that some of those who are now present among my disciples and women disciples will not savor death before seeing the Kingdom of God being established and its King crowned and anointed.»

They take to the road again talking animatedly while the sun is slowly setting in the sky...

346. Prophecy on Peter and Marjiam. The Blind Man at Bethsaida.

1st December 1945.

They are not walking any longer, but are running in the fresh dawn, which is more pleasant and clearer than the previous mornings; sparkling dewdrops and many-coloured petals fall on their heads and in the meadows, adding other hues to the countless shades of the little flowers growing on the banks of streams and in fields, and glistening on the grass like diamonds. They are running in the middle of warbling birds and in a light breeze that rustles among branches and caresses the hay and corn that grow higher and higher day by day; and they hear

the cheerful babbling of brooks flowing within their banks and gently bending the stems of flowers touching their clear water. They are running as if they were going to a tryst. Even the elderly ones, such as Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, the Zealot share the joyful haste of the younger ones. And the same is happening among the disciples, where the older ones vie with the younger ones in walking fast.

The meadows are still wet with dew when they reach the area of Bethsaida, enclosed in a little space between the lake, the river and the mountain. A youth bent under bundles of sticks is coming down from the wood in the mountain. He is coming down very fast, almost running, but he cannot see the apostles from his posture... He is singing happily while running under his burden of sticks, and as soon as he reaches the main road, at the first houses in Bethsaida, he throws his load to the ground and straightens himself up to rest, pushing back his dark hair. He is tall and thin, erect, and his body, although slender and agile, is strong. He is a handsome looking adolescent.

«It's Marjiam» says Andrew.

«Are you mad? That's a man» replies Peter.

Andrew cups his hands to his mouth and calls him in a loud voice. The young man, who was about to bend to pick up his load, after fastening the belt of his short tunic, which barely reaches his knees and is open at his chest probably because it is rather tight, turns round in the direction of the call and sees Jesus, Peter and the others who are looking at him, standing near a group of willows dipping into a large stream, the final left-hand tributary of the Jordan before the lake of Galilee, just outside the village. He drops the bundle, raises his arms and shouts: «My Lord! My father!» and he darts off.

Peter also dashes off, wading the brook in his sandals, he just pulls his garments up, and then runs along the dusty road, leaving the wet marks of his sandals on the dry ground.

«Father!» «Son!»

They embrace each other and Marjiam is really as tall as Peter, and thus his dark hair falls on Peter's face when they kiss each other. But as Marjiam is so slender, he looks taller.

Then, Marjiam breaks away from the loving embrace and resumes his race towards Jesus, Who is now on this side of the stream and is coming slowly

forward surrounded by the apostles. Marjiam falls at His feet, with his arms raised and he exclaims: «Oh! My Lord, bless Your servant!»

But Jesus bends, lifts him up and presses him to His heart kissing both his cheeks and wishing him «everlasting peace and increase in wisdom and grace in the ways of the Lord.»

The apostles also give a hearty welcome to the boy, particularly those who have not seen him for months and they congratulate him on his growth.

But Peter!... If he had procreated him he would not have been so pleased! He walks round him, looks at him, touches him, and asks the others: «Isn't he handsome? Isn't he well built? Look how straight he is! What a broad chest! And his straight legs!... A bit thin, not very sinewy as yet. But he is promising! Very good! And his face? Tell me whether he looks like the poor little fellow I carried in my arms last year, when he looked like a frail, miserable, sad, frightened bird... Well done, Porphirea! Ah! she has been very clever feeding him with plenty honey, butter, oil, eggs and fish liver. I must congratulate her at once. Do You mind, Master? May I go to see my wife?»

«Go, Simon. I will soon be with you.»

Marjiam, whose hand is still in that of Jesus, says: «Master, my father will certainly tell mother to prepare a meal for You. Let me go and help her...»

«Yes, go. And may God bless you for honouring your father and mother.»

Marjiam runs away, picks up his bundle of firewood, puts it on his shoulder, reaches Peter and walks beside him.

«They look like Abraham and Isaac climbing the mountain» remarks Bartholomew.

«Oh! Poor Marjiam! That would be the last straw indeed!» says Simon Zealot.

«And poor brother of mine! I don't know whether he would have the strength to act as Abraham...» says Andrew.

Jesus looks at him and then looks at the grey head of Peter, who is moving away close to his Marjiam, and He says: «I solemnly tell you that the day will come when Peter will rejoice knowing that his Marjiam has been imprisoned, beaten, scourged, sentenced to death, and that he would have the heart to lay the boy on the scaffold himself to clothe him with the purple of Heaven and to fertilise the

earth with the blood of a martyr, and he will be jealous and sorrowful for one reason only: that he is not in the place of his son and subordinate, because his election to Supreme Head of My Church will compel him to spare himself for the Church until I say to him: "Go and die for it." You do not know Peter yet. I do.»

«Do you foresee martyrdom for Marjiam and my brother?»

«Are you sorry, Andrew?»

«No. I am sorry that You do not foresee it also for me.»

«I solemnly tell you that you will all be clad with purple, except one.»

«Who?... Who?...»

«Let us be silent on the grief of God» Jesus says sadly but solemnly. And they are all silent, looking frightened and pensive.

They walk along the first road in Bethsaida, among vegetable gardens full of fresh greenery. Peter, with other people of Bethsaida, is leading a blind man towards Jesus. Marjiam is not there. He must have stayed at home to help Porphirea. Among the people of Bethsaida and the relatives of the blind man, there are many disciples who have come from Sicaminon and other towns, and among them there are Stephen, Hermas, John the priest, John the scribe and many more. (It is now quite a problem to remember them all: they are so many).

«I brought him to You, Lord. He has been waiting here for several days» explains Peter, while the blind man and his relatives singsong: «Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us!», «Touch with Your hand the eyes of my son, and he will see», «Have mercy on me, Lord! I believe in You!»

Jesus takes the blind man by the hand and walks back a few steps with him, to put him in the shade, as the street is flooded with sunbeams. He places him against a foliage-covered wall of the first house in the village, and stands in front of him. He wets both His forefingers with saliva and rubs the man's eyes with his moist fingers, He then presses His hands against his eyes, with the base of each hand against an eye-socket and His fingers spread out among the hair of the poor fellow. He prays and then removes His hands, asking: «What do you see?»

«I see some men. They must be men. But that is how I imagined trees in bloom. But they are certainly men, as they are walking and making signs to me.»

Jesus imposes His hands once again, then He removes them asking: «And now?»

«Oh! Now I clearly see the difference between trees planted in the ground and those men who are looking at me... And I see You! How handsome You are! Your eyes are like the sky and Your hair seems sunbeams... and Your look and Your smile come from God. Lord, I adore You!» and he kneels down kissing the hem of His tunic.

«Stand up and come to your mother who, for years has been your light and comfort and whose love you only know.»

He takes the man by the hand and leads him towards his mother, who has knelt down a few steps away in adoration, as shortly before she had done imploring.

«Stand up, woman. Here is your son. He now sees daylight and may his heart wish to follow the eternal Light. Go home and be happy. And live holily out of gratitude to God. But going through villages do not tell anybody that I cured you, lest the crowds should rush here and prevent Me from going where it is just that I should go, to confirm the faith and take light and joy to other children of My Father.»

And He quickly disappears along a little path among kitchen gardens, going toward Peter's house, which He enters greeting Porphirea kindly.

347. From Capernaum to Nazareth with Manaen and the Women Disciples.

2nd December 1945.

When they set foot on the little beach of Capernaum they are welcomed by shouting children who vie with swallows, now busy abuilding their new nests, so quickly they run from the beach to the houses, screeching in their shrill voices, cheerful with the simple joy of children, to whom everything is a wonderful sight and a mysterious object: a little fish found dead on the shore, or a pebble smoothed by the waves and that owing to its hue, looks like a precious stone, or a flower growing between two stones, or the iridescent scarab captured in flight. All wonderful things to be shown to their mothers so that they may

take part in the joy of their children.

But those little human swallows have now seen Jesus and all their flights converge towards Him, Who is about to set foot on the beach. And it is a warm live avalanche of children, a gentle chain of tender little hands, it is the love of children's hearts that welcome Jesus, Who is pressed, surrounded and warmed, as if they were a gentle fire.

«Me! Me!», «A kiss!», «To me!», «Also to me!», «Jesus! I love You!», «Don't go away any more for such a long time!», «I came here every day to see whether You were coming.», «And I used to go to Your house.»

«Take this flower, it was for my mother, but I give it to You.»

«Another kiss to me, a big one. You did not kiss me the first time, because Jael pushed me back...»

And their shrill voices continue to shout, while Jesus endeavours to walk in the midst of the loving net.

«Leave Him now! Go! That's enough now!» shout the apostles and disciples trying to loosen the press. Not a hope! They are like lianas equipped with suckers. They are detached here and they adhere there.

«Leave them! With a little patience we shall get there» says Jesus smiling and He takes extraordinarily short steps in order to proceed without treading on the children's bare feet.

What frees Him from the loving press is the arrival of Manaen with other disciples, among whom are the shepherds who were in Judaea.

«Peace to You, Master!» thunders Manaen who is imposing in his magnificent garment and no longer wears jewels on his forehead and fingers; a wonderful sword is instead hanging on his side and it excites the respectful admiration of the children, who, at the sight of the magnificent knight dressed in purple and carrying such a marvellous weapon on his side, move aside obviously frightened.

And Jesus can thus embrace him and Elias, Levi, Matthias, Joseph, John, Simeon and I do not know how many more. «How come you are here? And how did you know that I had landed?»

«We knew by the shouting of the children. They pierced walls like arrows of

joy. But I came here thinking that Your next trip to Judaea is now close at hand and that also the women will be taking part in it... I want to be there as well... To protect You, my Lord, if I am not too proud in thinking so. There is a great deal of excitement in Israel against You. I regret having to say so. But You are aware of it.»

And while speaking thus, they reach the house and go in. Manaen continues his speech after the landlord and his wife have worshipped the Master.

«By now the excitement and interest in You have pervaded every place, rousing and drawing the attention even of the most dull-minded people, who are normally concerned with entirely different matters. The news of what You have worked has passed even through the filthy walls of Machaerus and has reached the lustful refuges of Herod, that is: his palace in Tiberias, the castles of Herodias and the splendid royal palace of the Asmoneans near the Sixtus market. Like a wave of light and power the news passes through dark vile barriers, it demolishes the piles of sins placed as trenches to cover up the foul love affairs of the Court and its cruel crimes, it darts like an arrow of fire writing words that are by far graver than those written on the lewd walls of the lewd bedchambers and throne and banquet halls at Belshazzar's feast. The news shouts Your Name and power, Your Nature and Your Mission. And Herod trembles with fear; Herodias tosses in her bed fearing that You may be the revenging King, who will take her wealth and freedom, if not her very life, leaving her at the mercy of the populace, who will take revenge for her many crimes. They tremble at Court, because of You. They tremble with human and superhuman fear. Since they cut off John's head, a fire seems to be burning the bowels of his murderers. They do not even enjoy any longer their previous miserable peace, the peace of pigs sated with orgies, who silence their reproachful consciences in drunkenness or in copulation. Nothing can appease them... They are persecuted... And they hate each other, after making love, disgusted with each other, accusing each other of committing a crime that now perturbs them as it overstepped the limit. Salome, as if she were possessed by a demon, is shaken by such eroticism that would degrade even a slave girl. The Royal palace stinks more than a sewer. Herod has asked me about You several times. And every time I always replied to him: "As far as I am concerned He is the Messiah, the King of Israel of the unique royal stock: David's. He is the Son of man foretold by the Prophets, He is the Word of God, He, Who being the Christ, the Anointed of God, has the right to reign over all living beings." And Herod goes pale with fear as he realises that You are the Revenger. And as his courtiers, in order to comfort him say that You are John,

erroneously believed to be dead, thus making him faint with horror, or that You are Elijah or some other prophet of the past, he fights against his fear and the cry of his conscience devoured by remorse, saying: "No. He cannot be John! I had John beheaded and his head is safely kept by Herodias. And He cannot be one of the prophets. One does not live again after dying. Neither can He be the Christ. Who says that He is? Who dares to tell me that He is the King of the unique royal stock? I am the king! Nobody else is! The Messiah was killed by Herod the Great: He was drowned in a sea of blood, as soon as He was born. He was slaughtered like a little lamb... and He was only a few months old... Can you not hear Him weep? His bleating is always resounding within my head together with John's roar: 'It is against the Law for you to have her'... Is it against the Law for me?! No, it isn't! I am allowed everything, because I am 'the king'. I want wine and women here, if Herodias refuses my embraces, and let Salome dance to rouse my senses, which your fearful tales have frightened." And he gets drunk with the girl-mimes of the Court, while in her rooms the mad woman howls curses against the Martyr and threats to You, and Salome, in her rooms, realises what it means to be born of two lewd parents and to give assent to a crime and to have it committed by yielding one's body to the lubricious craving of a filthy man. When Herod comes to his senses, he wants to be informed about You and would like to see You. That is why he is in favour of my visits to You, as he hopes that I may take You to him. Which I will never do as I am not prepared to take Your holiness into a den of foul beasts. And Herodias would like to have You to strike You. And she shouts so holding her stiletto in her hands... And Salome would like to have You, as she saw You at Tiberias, without Your knowing it, last Ethaniam and is mad for You... That is the Royal Palace, Master! But I am remaining there so that I can keep an eye on what they intend doing to You.»

«And I am grateful to you for it and the Most High blesses you. That is also a way to serve the Most High in His decrees.»

«That is what I thought. And that is why I came.»

«Manaen, since you have come, I ask you to do Me a favour. Do not come towards Jerusalem with Me, but go with the women. I shall go with My disciples along an unknown road and no one will be able to injure Me. But they are women and unprotected and he who is to accompany them is a meek soul and has been taught to offer his other cheek to anyone who should strike him. Your presence will be a safe protection. I understand that it is a sacrifice, but we

shall be together in Judaea. My dear friend, do not deny Me this favour.»

«Lord, every desire of Yours is law to Your servant. I am at the service of Your Mother and of the women disciples as from this moment, until You wish so.»

«Thank you. Also this obedience of yours will be written in Heaven. Now, while waiting for the boats, let us cure the sick people who are waiting for Me.»

And Jesus goes down into the kitchen garden where there are stretchers and sick people and He cures them at once, while Jairus and a few friends of Capernaum pay their respects to Him.

In the meantime the women – that is: Porphirea and Salome, Bartholomew's elderly wife and Philip's less elderly one with her young daughters – are busy preparing food for the large crowd of disciples whose hunger will be satisfied with the baskets of fish offered by the people of Bethsaida and Capernaum. And a great deal of gutting the still wriggling silvery fish, of washing them in basins and grilling them is done in the kitchen while Marjiam and some other disciples keep the fire going and bring pitchers of water to help the women.

The meal is soon ready and soon over. And as sufficient boats have already been assembled, all they have to do is to embark for Magdala, on an enchanting lake, which is so serene and angelical in the emerald green setting of its shores.

The hospitable house and gardens of Mary of Magdala welcome the Master and His disciples in the midday sun, and the whole of Magdala rushes to greet the Rabbi, Who is going towards Jerusalem.

And the faithful crowd march nimbly and happily along the cool slopes of the Galilean hills, followed by a comfortable wagon in which there are Johanna with Porphirea, Salome, the wives of Bartholomew and Philip with the latter's two young daughters and the two cheerful little orphans adopted by Johanna, Matthias and Mary, whose aspects have altered beyond recognition from what they were five months ago. Marjiam is marching bravely with the grown up people, and as instructed by Jesus he is in the apostolic group, between Peter and John, and does not miss a word; of what Jesus says.

The sun is shining in a very clear sky and gusts of warm wind carry the scents of woods, mint, violets, early lilies of the valley, rose-bushes full of flowers, and above all, the fresh lightly bitterish scent of the blossoms of fruit-trees, which everywhere pour a shower of snow-white petals on the grassland. They all have

petals in their hair while they proceed among the continuous warbling of birds, among enticing songs and anxious calls from one thicket to another, between bold males and demure females, while sheep graze, fat through their maternity, and the first little lambs knock their little muzzles against the round udders to increase the secretion of milk, or they jump about the meadows covered with tender grass, like happy children.

They soon reach Nazareth after Cana, where Susanna joins the other women, taking with her the products of her land in baskets and vases and a whole shoot of red roses, all in bud and about to open, «to be offered to Mary» she says.

«I have some, too, see?» says Johanna uncovering a kind of box, in which many roses have been laid among damp moss: «They are the first and the most beautiful ones. But still nothing for Her, Who is so dear!»

I see that every woman has brought food for the Passover pilgrimage and with the food some have brought flowers, some plants for Mary's garden. Porphirea apologises for bringing only a vase of camphor, which is magnificent with its tiny blue-green leaves that exhale their aroma even when they are lightly touched. «Mary wanted this balsamic plant...» she says. And they all praise her for the luxuriant beauty of the young tree. «Oh! I have watched over it all winter, protecting it from frost and hail in my room. Marjiam helped me to take it out in the sun every morning, and bring it in at night... And if there had been no boat and no wagon, that dear boy would have loaded it on his shoulder to carry it to Mary, to do Her and me a favour» says the humble woman, who takes heart more and more through Johanna's kindness and who is beside herself with the joy of going to Jerusalem with the Master, her husband and Marjiam.

«Have you never been there?»

«When my father lived I used to go every year. But later... My mother did not go any more... My brothers would have taken me, but I was a help to my mother and she would not let me go. Then I married Simon and my health has not been very good. The journey would have taken Simon a long time and he was bored... So I stayed at home waiting for him... The Lord saw my desire... and it was the same as if I offered my sacrifice in the Temple...» says the meek woman.

And Johanna, who is near her, lays her hand on her wonderful plaits, saying: «My dear!». And there is so much love, understanding and meaning in that adjective.

There is Nazareth... there is the house of Mary of Alphaeus who is already in the arms of her sons; and with her hands, which are dripping and red as she is doing the washing, she caresses them, and then, drying her hands in her coarse apron, she runs to embrace Jesus... And there is the house of Alphaeus of Sarah, immediately before Mary's house. Alphaeus tells his oldest grandchild to run and tell Mary, and he strides towards Jesus holding an armful of grandchildren in his arms and he greets Him together with the children held in his arms like a bunch of flowers offered to Jesus. And there is Mary: She appears at the door, in the sunshine, wearing a light blue dress, which is slightly faded, with Her golden hair shining on Her virginal forehead and forming a heavy knot of plaits on Her nape; She falls on the chest of Her Son, Who kisses Her with all His love.

The others stop discreetly to leave them free in their first meeting. But Mary moves away, turns round, Her face, unaltered by age, is now rosy because of the surprise and Her bright smiles, and She greets with Her angelical voice: «Peace to you, servants of the Lord and disciples of My Son. Peace to you, sisters in the Lord» and She exchanges a sisterly kiss with the women disciples, who have come off the wagon.

«Oh! Marjiam! I will no longer be able to hold you in My arms! You are a man now. But come to the Mother of all good children, I can still give you a kiss. My dear! May God bless you and make you grow in His ways, as strongly as your young body is growing, and even more. Son, we must take him to his grandfather. He will be so happy to see him thus» She then says turning round to Jesus.

She then embraces James and Judas of Alphaeus. And She gives them the news that certainly pleases them most of all: «Simon this year is coming with Me, as a disciple of the Master. He told Me.»

And She greets one by one the more familiar ones, the more influential ones, saying graceful words to each of them. Manaen is led towards Her by Jesus, Who introduces him as Her escort in the journey to Jerusalem.

«Are You not coming with us, Son?»

«Mother, I have other places to evangelize. We shall meet at Bethany.»

«May Your will be done now and always. Thank you, Manaen. You: a human angel; our guardians: the angels in Heaven; and we shall be as safe as if we were in the Holy of Holies.» And She offers Her little hand to Manaen in token of

friendship. And the knight, who has been brought up in courtly manners, kneels down to kiss the gentle hand offered to him.

In the meantime the flowers and what is to be left in Nazareth has been unloaded. The wagon is taken to one of the stables in town.

The little house looks like a rosary with the roses that the women disciples have strewn everywhere. But Porphirea's plant, laid on a table, is the one that is mostly admired by Mary, Who has it taken to a suitable place according to the directions of Peter's wife.

They cannot certainly all go into the little house or the kitchen garden, which is not an estate, but it seems to rise toward the sky and become airy, so many are the clouds of blossoms on the trees in the garden. And Judas of Alphaeus asks Mary smiling: «Have You picked Your branch for Your amphora today?»

«Most certainly, Judas. And I was contemplating it when you arrived...»

«And You were dreaming once again, Mother, of Your remote mystery...» says Jesus, embracing Her with His left arm and drawing Her close to His heart.

Mary raises Her flushed face and says with a sigh: «Yes, Son, and I was dreaming again of the first throb of Your heart within Me...»

Jesus says: «Let the women disciples, the apostles, Marjiam, the shepherd-disciples, John the priest, Stephen, Hermas and Manaen stay here. The others can spread out looking for lodgings...»

«Many can stay with me...» shouts Simon of Alphaeus from the door where he has been stopped. «I am their fellow-disciple and I claim them.»

«Oh! brother, come in, that I may kiss your» says Jesus effusively, while Alphaeus of Sarah, Ishmael and Aser, the two disciples, formerly donkey drivers, of Nazareth, say: «Come to our houses!»

The disciples who have not been chosen to stay, go away and the door can be closed... but it is opened once again immediately afterwards, for the arrival of Mary of Alphaeus, who cannot stay away, even if her washing is going to be spoiled. They are about forty people and they spread through the warm peaceful garden, until food is handed out, and everybody finds it has a celestial flavour, so happy they are to take it in the house of the Lord, and handed out by Mary.

Simon comes back after settling the disciples and says: «You did not call me

with the others, but I am Your brother and I am staying here just the same.»

«Very well, Simon, come here. I wanted you to be here to meet Mary. Many of you know Mary as the “mother”; some as the “spouse”. But no one knows Her as the “virgin” Mary. I want you to become acquainted with Her in this garden in bloom, to which your hearts desire to come when you are compelled to be far away, as to a resting place after your apostolate work.

I listened to you apostles, disciples and relatives speak, and I heard your impressions, your recollections and your statements concerning My Mother. I will transfigure all that, which is admirable although still very human, into a supernatural knowledge. Because My Mother is to be transfigured, before Me, in the eyes of the most deserving, to show Her as She is. You see a woman. A woman different from other women, because of Her holiness, but in actual fact you see Her as a soul enveloped in a body, just like all women Her sisters. But now I wish to reveal to you the soul of My Mother. Her true and eternal beauty.

Come here, Mother. Do not blush. Do not withdraw shyly, sweet dove of God. Your Son is the Word of God and He can speak of You and of Your mystery, of Your mysteries, o sublime Mystery of God. Let us sit down here, in the pleasant shade of the trees in blossom near the house, near Your holy room. Thus! Let us lift this fluttering curtain, so that waves of holiness and Paradise may come out of this virginal room, to saturate us all with Your virtues... Yes. Me as well. That I may smell of You, o perfect Virgin, so that I may be able to bear the stench of the world, in order that I may see purity after saturating My eyes with Your Purity... Marjiam, John, Stephen come here, and you, women disciples, stand directly in front of the open door of the chaste abode of the most Chaste amongst women. And you, My friends, stand behind. And You, My beloved Mother, here, beside Me.

A little while ago I said to you: “the eternal beauty of the soul of My Mother”. I am the Word, and thus I can make use of words without erring. I said: eternal, not immortal. And I deliberately said so. He is immortal who, after being born, does not die. Thus the souls of the just are immortal in Heaven, the souls of sinners are immortal in Hell, because a soul, once it has been created, does not die but to grace. But a soul has life, it exists from that moment that God thinks it (1). It is the Thought of God that creates it. The soul of My Mother was thought by God from everlasting. It is therefore eternal in its beauty, in which God poured every perfection to receive delight and comfort from it.

It is written in the Book of our ancestor Solomon, who foresaw You, and can thus be called Your prophet: “God possessed me from the beginning of His works, from the very beginning, before Creation. From everlasting I was firmly set, from the beginning, before the Earth came into being. The deep was not yet, and I was conceived. There were no springs to gush with water, the mountains were not yet settled on their huge mass, and I already was. Before the hills I came to birth. He had not yet made the Earth, the rivers, or the poles of the world, and I already existed. When He prepared the sky and Heaven I was present. When with inviolable law He closed the abyss under the vault, when He fixed firm the celestial vault and He suspended there the sources of water, when He assigned the sea its boundaries and He ordered the water not to pass its limit, when He laid down the foundations of the earth, I was by His side arranging everything. I was always joyfully at play in His presence. I played in the universe.”

Yes, Mother, with Whom God, Immense, Sublime, Virgin, Uncreated, was pregnant and carried You like a most sweet burden, rejoicing at feeling You stir within Him, when with Your smiles He created the Universe! He laboriously gave birth to You to give You to the world, most gentle soul, born of the Deity to be the “Virgin”, the Perfection of Creation, the Light of Paradise, the Advice of God, *Who looking at You forgave Sin, because You alone, by Yourself can love as all Mankind put together cannot love.* In You is the Forgiveness of God! *You are the Treatment of God, You are the caress of the Eternal Father on the wound that man inflicted on God!* In You is the Salvation of the world, Mother of the Love Incarnate and of the granted Redeemer! The soul of My Mother! Merged in Love with My Father, I looked at You within Me, o soul of My Mother!... And Your splendour, Your prayer, the idea of being carried by You comforted Me forever and ever for My destiny of sorrow and inhuman experience of what the corrupted world is for the most Perfect God. Thank You, Mother! When I came I was already full of Your consolation, I descended perceiving You alone, Your perfume, Your song, Your love... Joy, My joy!

Now that you know that one only is the Woman in Whom there is no stain, that one only Human Being costs the Redeemer no injury, listen to the second transfiguration of Mary, the Elect Daughter of God.

It was a clear afternoon in the month of Adar and the trees were in bloom in the silent kitchen garden, and Mary, Joseph's bride, had picked a flowery branch to replace the one that was in Her room. Mary, taken from the Temple to adorn a

house of saints, had recently come to Nazareth. And with Her soul divided among Temple, house and Heaven, She was looking at the flowery branch, considering that by means of a similar branch, which had bloomed in an unusual manner, a branch cut off in this garden in the depth of winter and had bloomed as if it were springtime before the Ark of the Lord – perhaps the Sun-God beaming in His Glory had warmed it – God had revealed His will to Her... And She was thinking also that on the day of their wedding Joseph had brought Her other flowers, but never like the first one on the thin petals of which it was written: “I want You united to Joseph”... She was thinking of many things... And while thinking She ascended to God. Her hands were busy with distaff and spindle and were spinning a yam that was thinner than the hair of Her young head...

Her soul was weaving a carpet of love, moving quickly, like a shuttle on a loom, from the earth to Heaven. From the needs of the house, of Joseph, to those of the soul, of God. And She sang and prayed. And the carpet was forming on the mystical loom, it rolled off from the earth to Heaven, it ascended to get lost up there... Formed with what? With the thin, perfect strong threads of Her virtues, with the flying thread of the shuttle, which She thought was “Hers”, whereas it was God's: the shuttle of the Will of God, on which was rolled the will of the little, great Virgin of Israel, Unknown to the World, Known to God, rolled and made one with the Will of the Lord. And the carpet was adorned with the flowers of love, of purity, with palms of peace and palms of glory, with sweet-smelling violets, with jasmines... Every virtue flowered on the carpet of love, which the Virgin of God unrolled invitingly from the earth to Heaven. And as the carpet was not sufficient She thrust Her heart singing: “Let My Beloved come into His garden and eat the fruit of His trees... Let My Beloved come down to His garden, to the bed of spices, to pasture in the gardens and gather lilies. I am My Beloved's and My Beloved is Mine. He pastures among the lilies!” And from infinite distance, among torrents of Light, a Voice came that human ear cannot hear and human throat cannot utter. And it said: “How beautiful You are, My love! How beautiful You are!... Your lips distill wild honey... You are a garden enclosed, a sealed fountain, My sister, My promised bride... “ and the two voices joined together to sing the eternal truth: “Love is stronger than death. Nothing can quench or drown 'our' love.” And the Virgin was thus transfigured when Gabriel descended and called Her back to the Earth, with his ardour, and joined Her soul to Her body again, so that She might hear and understand the request of Him, Who had called Her “Sister” but wanted Her to be His “Bride”.

And the Mystery took place there... And a modest woman, the most modest of all women, Who was not even aware of the instinctive incentive of the flesh, fainted before the Angel of God, because even an angel upsets the humility and modesty of the Virgin, and only when She heard him speak She calmed down, and She believed, and She said the word, whereby “their” love became Flesh and will defeat Death and no flood will be able to quench it or wickedness to submerge it...»

Jesus bends gently over Mary Who has slid to His feet, almost ecstatically, in the recollection of the remote hour, shining with a special light, which seems to issue from Her soul, and He asks Her in a low voice: «Which was Your reply, Most Pure Mother, to him who assured You that by becoming Mother of God, You would not lose Your perfect Virginity?»

And Mary, almost in a dream, slowly, smiling, Her eyes shining with joyful tears: «I am the handmaid of the Lord! Let it be done to Me according to your Word» and She reclines Her head on the knees of Her Son, adoring Him.

Jesus covers Her with His mantle, concealing Her from everybody's eyes and He says: «And it was done. All will be done until the end. Until Her next transfiguration and the one after that. She will always be the “Handmaid of God”. She will always act according to what “the Word” says. My Mother! That is My Mother. And you ought to begin to become fully acquainted with Her holy Figure... Mother! Mother! Raise Your face, My Beloved... Call Your devout admirers back to the Earth, where we are for the time being...» He says uncovering Mary after a little while, during which no noise was heard except the humming of bees and the gurgling of the little fountain.

Mary raises Her face wet with tears and whispers: «Why did You do that to Me, Son? The secrets of the King are sacred...»

«But the King can reveal them whenever He wishes. Mother, I did it, so that the words of the Prophet may be understood: “A Woman will enclose the Man in Herself”, and the words of the other Prophet: “The Virgin will conceive and give birth to a Son.” And also that My disciples, who are struck with horror at too many things that they consider degrading for the Word of God, may have, as counterbalance, many other things confirming them in the joy of being “Mine”. Thus they will no longer be scandalised and will conquer Heaven... Now those who have to go to the house where they are guests, may go. I am staying with the women and Marjiam. All the men must be here tomorrow at dawn, because I

want to take you to a place nearby. We shall then come back and say goodbye to the women, and then we shall go to Capernaum to gather other disciples and tell them to follow the women...»

348. The Transfiguration and the Curing of the Epileptic.

3rd December 1945.

Which man has never seen, at least once, a clear dawn in the month of March? If such a man exists, he must be very unhappy, because he is unaware of one of the most beautiful charms of nature awakening in springtime, when she becomes the virgin girl as creation must have been on its first day.

In such graceful charm, which is pure from every point of view, from its fresh dewy herbs, to the little flowers that are opening, like babies who are born, to the first smile of daylight, to the birds that awake flapping their wings and utter their first chirps, which sound like questions and are a prelude to all their singing conversation of the day, to the very smell of the air that during the night has lost all pollution of dust, smoke and smell of human bodies through the lavation of dew and the absence of man, Jesus is proceeding with His apostles and disciples. Simon of Alphaeus is with them, too. They are going southwards, crossing the hills that encircle Nazareth and a torrent, and are walking across a narrow plain between the Nazarene hills and a group of mountains to the east. These mountains are preceded by the semi-truncate cone of the Tabor, the top of which strangely reminds me of the cocked-hat of our carabineers, seen in profile.

They reach it. Jesus stops and says: «Peter, John and James of Zebedee will come up the mountain with Me. The rest will spread out at its foot, going in groups towards the roads that run along it, to preach the Lord. I want to be back in Nazareth by evening. So do not go too far away. Peace be with you.» And addressing the three He had called, He says: «Let us go.» And He begins to climb without turning back any more and with such a quick pace that Peter finds it difficult to follow Him.

When they rest for a moment, Peter, flushed and perspiring, asks Him panting: «But where are we going? There are no houses on the mountain. On the top

there is only that old fortress. Do You want to go and preach there?»

«I would have gone up the other side. But you can see that I have turned My back to it. We are not going to the fortress, and those who are in it, will not even see us. I am going to be united to My Father, and I wanted you to be with Me, because I love you. Come on, quick!»

«Oh! My Lord! Could we not go a little slower, instead, and speak of what we heard and saw yesterday, which kept us awake all night to talk about it?»

«You always go quickly to the appointments with God. Come on, Simon Peter. I will let you rest up there.» And He resumes climbing...

(Jesus says: «Put here the Transfiguration seen on August 5th 1944, but without the dictation added to it. After copying the Transfiguration of last year, P.M. will copy what I am going to show you now.»).

5th August 1944.

I am with my Jesus upon a high mountain. Peter, James and John are with Jesus. They climb higher up and their eyes rove over open horizons, the details of which are well defined, even in the distance, in the beautiful clear day.

The mountain is not part of a range of mountains like the one in Judaea; it rises isolated, with the east in front, with respect to the place where we are, the north to the left, the south to the right, and at the rear, to the west, the summit, which is about one hundred steps higher up. It is very high and the view extends over a very wide range.

The lake of Gennesaret looks like a strip of sky that has come down to be set in the green of the earth, an oval turquoise enclosed by emeralds of various shades, a mirror that trembles and ripples in a light breeze, and on which boats in full sail glide as nimbly as sea-gulls, lightly bent towards the blue water, exactly with the grace of the flight of a kingfisher skimming the water in search of prey. Then a vein flows out from the vast turquoise, it is pale blue where the river-bed is wider, and darker where the banks narrow and the water is deeper and in the shade of the trees that grow luxuriantly near the river, nourished by its water. The Jordan looks like an almost straight stroke of a brush in the greenery of the plain.

Some villages are scattered here and there on both sides of the river. Some are

only a handful of houses, others are somewhat larger, with the airs of little towns. The main roads are yellowish lines among the green. But here, on the side of the mountain, the plain is more cultivated and fertile and it is really beautiful. The various hues of the several growths are a most pleasant sight in the beautiful sunshine of a very clear day.

It must be springtime, perhaps the month of March, if I take into account the latitude of Palestine, because I see the corn, which is already high, although still green, waving like a blue-green sea and I see the crests of the early fruit-trees decorate this little vegetable sea with something like tiny white and rosy clouds, and meadows strewn with the flowers of the high hay, where grazing sheep look like piles of snow spread here and there on the green grass.

Just near the mountain, on the low short hills at its foot, there are two little towns, one to the south and the other to the north. The very fertile plain extends particularly and more widely to the south.

Jesus, after a short rest in the cool shade of a group of trees, a pause which He certainly granted out of pity for Peter, who clearly has great difficulty in climbing, resumes going up. He goes almost to the top, where there is a grassy tableland with a semicircle of trees near the side of the mountain.

«You may rest, My friends. I am going over there to pray.» And He points to a large stone, a rock that appears on the surface of the mountain and is not near the slope, but it lies internally, towards the summit.

Jesus kneels on the grass and rests His hands and head on the rock, in the posture that He will take also when praying in Gethsemane. The top of the mountain protects Him from the sun. The remaining part of the grass-covered clearing is in the bright sun as far as the bordering trees, where the apostles are sitting in the shade.

Peter takes off his sandals, shakes off dust and grit and remains barefooted, with his tired feet on the cool grass, almost lying down, with his head resting on an emerald green tuft, as a pillow. James does the same, but in order to be comfortable he looks for a tree, against which he leans his mantle and rests his back. John remains sitting looking at the Master. But the calm of the place, the fresh breeze, silence and fatigue overcome him also and he droops his head and eyes. None of them are fast asleep, but they are in the state of summer drowsiness that stuns people.

They (the three Apostles James, John, Peter) are roused by a brilliancy that is so striking that it overwhelms the brightness of the sun and spreads and penetrates even into the shade of bushes and trees where the apostles are.

They open their eyes and are astonished at seeing Jesus transfigured. He is exactly as I see in the visions of Paradise. Of course He has no Wounds and there is no banner of the Cross. But the majesty of His Face and Body is the same, the brightness is also the same and His garment, too, is identical: from deep red it has changed into a immaterial fabric of diamonds and pearls, in which He is clad in Heaven. His face shines with an extremely intense sidereal light in which His sapphire eyes are beaming. He looks taller, as if His glorification had increased His height. I cannot say whether the brilliancy, which makes even the tableland phosphorescent, emanates, entirely from Him, or whether His own is mingled with the brightness that all the light in the Universe and of Heaven has concentrated on Him. I can only say that it is something indescribable.

Jesus is now standing, I would say that He is raised off the ground, because between Him and the green meadow there is something like a luminous vapor, a space consisting only of a light upon which He seems to be standing. But it is so bright that I may be wrong, and in fact that I no longer see any green grass under Jesus' feet may be due to the bright light that vibrates and waves, as is often seen in bonfires. It is snow-white incandescent light. Jesus is looking at the sky and smiling at a vision that enraptures Him.

The Apostles are almost afraid and they call Him, as He is transfigured so much that He no longer appears to be their Master. They call Him: «Master, Master!» He does not hear them. «He is in ecstasy» says Peter trembling. «I wonder what He sees?»

The three Apostles are now standing up. They would like to approach Jesus, but they dare not.

The light increases further because of two lights that descend from the sky and take place at Jesus' sides. When they settle on the tableland, their veils open and two majestic bright personages appear. One is more elderly than the other, with a sharp severe countenance, and he has a double-pointed beard. Two horns of light depart from his forehead and make me understand that he is Moses. The other one is emaciated, bearded and hairy, more or less like the Baptist, whom I would say resembles in height, leanness, structure and severity. While the light

emanating from Moses is white, like that of Jesus, particularly with regard to the beams issuing from their foreheads, the light of Elijah is like the bright flame of the sun.

The two Prophets take a reverential attitude before their God Incarnate and although He speaks to them with familiarity, they do not drop their respectful attitude. I do not understand even one of the words they speak.

The three apostles fall on their knees trembling and covering their faces with their hands. They would like to look, but they are afraid. At last Peter says: «Master, listen to me.» Jesus looks round smiling towards His Peter, who takes heart again and says: «It is wonderful to be here with You, Moses and Elijah. If You wish, we will make three tents, one for You, one for Moses and one for Elijah, and we will stay here to serve you...»

Jesus looks at him and smiles more warmly. He looks also at John and James, a glance that is a loving embrace. Also, Moses and Elijah stare at the three. Their eyes flash fire. They must be like rays piercing hearts.

The Apostles dare not say anything more. Frightened as they are, they lapse into silence. They look as if they were inebriated, like people who are bewildered. But then a veil, which is neither fog, nor a cloud, nor a ray, envelops the Three glorious personages behind a screen that is even brighter than the one that surrounded the previously, and hides them from sight of the Apostles, a powerful harmonious Voice vibrates filling the air, three bow down with their faces on the grass.

The Voice says: «This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him.»

Peter falling flat on his face, exclaims: «Have mercy on me, a sinner! It is the Glory of God descending!!». James does not utter a single word. John whispers with a sigh, as if he were about to swoon: «The Lord is speaking!»

Even when there is total silence again, none of them dare raise their heads. Thus they do not even see that the light has come back to its natural state of daylight and that Jesus is alone and has become the usual Jesus wearing His red mantle.

He walks towards them smiling, touches them and calls them by their names. «Stand up. It is I. Be not afraid» He says, because the three dare not raise their faces and are imploring mercy for their sins, fearing that the Lamb of God wants to show them to the Most High. «Stand up, now. I order you» repeats Jesus

authoritatively. They look up and see Jesus smile.

«Oh! Master, my God!» exclaims Peter. «How shall we be able to live near You, now that we have seen Your Glory? How shall we be able to live among men and among ourselves, since we are sinners, and we have heard the Voice of God?»

«You will have to live beside Me and see My glory until the end. Be worthy of that because the time is close at hand. Obey My Father and yours. Let us now go back among men because I came to stay with them and to bring God to them. Let us go. Be holy, strong and faithful in remembrance of this hour. You will take, part in My greater glory. But do not speak now to anybody of what you have seen. Do not tell your companions either. When the Son of man has risen from the dead and gone back to the glory of the Father, then you will speak. Because it will be necessary to believe then, to take part in My Kingdom.»

«But is Elijah not to come to prepare people for Your Kingdom? So the rabbis say.»

«Elijah has already come to prepare the way for the Lord. Everything is happening as was revealed. But those who teach revelation do not know and do not understand it, neither do they see or recognise the signs of the time or the messengers of God. Elijah has come back once. He will come for the second time when the last time is close at hand to prepare the last for God. He now came to prepare the first for the Christ, and men refused to acknowledge him, they tortured him and put him to death. They will do the same to the Son of man, because men do not want to acknowledge what is good for them.»

The three lower their heads and become pensive and sad while descending the mountain with Jesus by the same road they came up.

[3rd December 1945 continuation].

... And it is Peter again who says, while stopping half way down: «Ah! Lord! I also say what Your Mother said yesterday: “Why did You do that to us?”, and I also say: “Why did You tell us that?”. Your last words have destroyed in our hearts the joy of the glorious sight! This has been a great day of fear! First we were frightened by the great light that roused us, it was stronger than if the whole mountain had been ablaze, or the moon had descended to light up the tableland right in front of us; then Your sight and Your rising from the ground as if You were going to fly away. I was afraid that You, being disgusted with the

iniquity of Israel, were going back to Heaven, perhaps by order of the Most High. Then I was frightened when I saw Moses appear, as the people of his days could not look at him without a veil, so brightly the reflection of God shone on his face, and he was still a man, whereas now he is a blessed spirit inflamed with God, and Elijah... Divine Mercy! I thought I had come to my last moment, and all the sins of my life, since the time I was a child and used to steal fruit in the pantry, to the last one, when some days ago I gave You wrong advice, came to my mind. And trembling with fear I repented! Then I got the impression that those two just men were fond of me... and I dared to speak. But even their love frightened me, because I do not deserve the love of such spirits. And then!... The most dreadful of all fears! The voice of God!... Jehovah has spoken! He said to us: "Listen to Him!". You! And He proclaimed You: "His Beloved Son in Whom He is well pleased." What a fright! Jehovah!... to us!... It was certainly Your power only that kept us alive!... When You touched us, and Your fingers burnt like points of fire, I had the last fright. I thought that the hour had come when I was to be judged and that the Angel touched me to take my soul to the Most High... But how could Your Mother see... hear... and live, in that hour that You told us yesterday, and not die, and She was alone, a young girl, without You?»

«Mary, the Immaculate, could not be afraid of God. Eve was not afraid, while she was innocent. And I was there. I, the Father and the Spirit, We, Who are in Heaven and on the earth and everywhere, and Who had our Tabernacle in the heart of Mary» says Jesus gently.

«How wonderful!... But later You spoke of death... And our joy came to an end... But why all that just to us three? Was it not better to give the vision of Your glory to everybody?»

«Just because you become senseless when you hear Me speak of death, and death by torture, of the Son of man, the Man-God decided to fortify you for that hour and for the future, by means of the foreknowledge of what I will be after Death. Remember all that, so that you may tell people in due time... Have you understood?»

«Oh! yes, Lord. It is not possible to forget it. And it would be quite useless to tell people. They would say that we are "drunk".»

They resume their way down towards the valley. But when they arrive at a certain point, Jesus takes a very steep side path towards Endor, that is in the

opposite direction to the place where He left the disciples.

«We will not find them» says James. «The sun is beginning to set. They will be gathering where You left them, waiting for You.»

«Come and do not worry about foolish thoughts.» In fact, where the brushwood opens on to a grassland that slopes gently as far as the main road, they see at the foot of the mountain the whole group of the disciples, who are very excited and with them there are some curious wayfarers and some scribes who have come from I do not know where.

«Alas! Scribes!... And they are discussing already!» says Peter pointing at them. And he walks down the last few metres halfheartedly.

But the apostles down there have also seen them and they point them out to one another and then they begin to run towards Jesus shouting: «How come, Master, You are here? We were about to go to the appointed place. But we have been held back by a discussion with scribes and by the entreaties of a worried father.»

«What were you discussing?»

«We were disputing about a possessed man. The scribes sneered at us because we were not able to free him. Judas of Kerioth tried several times out of pique. But in vain. So we said to them: "Try yourselves." They replied: "We are not exorcisers." Some people coming from Caslot-Tabor happened to pass by and among them there were two exorcisers. But they did not succeed either. Here is the father coming to implore You. Listen to him.»

A man in fact comes forward imploring and he kneels before Jesus, Who is still on the sloping meadow and is thus at least three metres higher up than the road and clearly visible to everybody.

The man says to Him: «Master, I went to Capernaum with my son, looking for You. I took my unhappy son to You, that You might free him, as You expel demons and You cure all diseases. He is often possessed by a mute spirit. When it takes him, he can but shout hoarsely, like an animal that is choking. The spirit throws him on the ground, where he rolls grinding his teeth, foaming like a horse biting the bit, or he injures himself, or he risks dying drowned or burned or smashed, because the spirit more than once has thrown him into the water, in the fire or down the steps. Your disciples tried, but they were not successful. Oh! Good Lord! Have mercy on me and on my child!»

Jesus blazes with majesty while He shouts: «O wicked generation, o satanic crowd, rebel legion, incredulous and cruel people of Hell, how long will I have to be in touch with you? How long shall I have to put up with you?» He is so imposing that there is dead silence at once and the sneers of the scribes stop.

Jesus says to the father: «Stand up and bring your son here.»

The man goes away and comes back with other men and in the middle of the group there is a boy about twelve or fourteen years old. He is a handsome boy, but looks rather dull-witted, as if he were bewildered. There is a long red wound on his forehead and under it an old white scar. As soon as he sees Jesus Who stares at him with His magnetic eyes, he utters a hoarse cry and his whole body writhes convulsively and he falls to the ground foaming and rolling his eyes, so that only the white globes can be seen, while he rolls on the ground in a typical epileptic fit.

Jesus comes forward a few steps to be close to him and says: «How long has that been happening to him? Speak in a loud voice, so that everybody may hear you.»

And while the crowds press closer and the scribes go above Jesus to dominate the scene, the man shouting says: «Since he was a boy. I told You: he often falls on the fire, into water or down the steps or from trees, because the spirit attacks him suddenly and throws him about to kill him. He is covered with scars and burns. He is lucky that the flames of the fireplace have not blinded him. No doctor, no exorciser, not even Your disciples have been able to cure him. But You, if, as I firmly believe, can do something, have mercy on us and help us.»

«If you can believe thus, everything is possible to Me, because everything is granted to those who believe.»

«Oh! Lord, I do believe! But if I do not believe sufficiently, increase my faith, so that it may be complete and I may obtain the miracle» says the man weeping, while he kneels beside his son, who has fallen into a more severe convulsive fit.

Jesus straightens Himself up, takes two steps back, and while the circle of the crowd presses closer and closer, He shouts loudly: «Cursed spirit, who make this boy deaf and mute and torture him, I order you: go out of him and never go back into him!»

The boy, although lying on the ground, bounces frightfully, arches his back with feet and head on the ground, utters inhuman cries; and after a last bounce, he

turns round, falls flat on his face striking his forehead and mouth against a large stone emerging from the grass, which becomes stained with blood, and lies motionless.

«He is dead!» many shout. «Poor boy!», «Poor father!» say the better ones pitying them. And the scribes, sneering say: «The Nazarene has served you well!», or: «Master, how come? Beelzebub has made You cut a bad figure this time...» and they laugh spitefully.

Jesus replies to no one. Not even to the father, who has turned his son round and is wiping the blood off the injured forehead and lips, moaning and imploring Jesus. And the Master bends, takes child by the hand. And the boy opens his eyes with a deep sigh, as if he were awaking from sleep, he sits up and smiles. Jesus draws him close to Himself, makes him stand up and hands him to his father, while the crowds cheer enthusiastically, and the scribes run away chased by the mockery of the crowd...

«And now let us go» says Jesus to His disciples. And after dismissing the crowds He goes round the side of the mountain towards the road along which He came in the morning.

Jesus says:

«And here P.M. can now put the comment on the vision of August 5th 1944 (copybook A 930) beginning from the words: “I am not choosing you for the only purpose of making you acquainted with the sadness and the sorrows of your Master. Those who are able to stay with Me sharing My grief must share My glory as well.” And you, My faithful little John, have a rest, because you well deserve it. May My peace bring joy to you.»

[5th August 1944 continuation].

Jesus says:

« I am not choosing you for the only purpose of making you acquainted with the sadness and the sorrows of your Master. Those who are able to stay with Me sharing My grief must share My joy as well.

When you are before your Jesus and He shows Himself to you, I want you to have the same feelings of humility and repentance as My apostles had. *You must never be proud. You would be punished by losing Me.* You must always bear in

mind Who I am and who you are. You must always remember your faults and My perfection so that your heart may be cleansed by contrition. But at the same time you must put so much trust in Me.

I said: “Be not afraid. Stand up. Let us go. Let us go among men, because I have come to be with them. Be holy, strong and faithful in remembrance of this hour.” I say so also to you and to all My favourites among men, to those who have Me in a special way.

Be not afraid of Me. I show Myself to you to elevate you all, not to incinerate you.

Stand up: may the joy of the gift give you energy and do not let it blunt your minds with the savour of quietism, considering yourselves already saved because I have shown Heaven to you.

Let us go together among men. I have invited you to superhuman deeds by means of superhuman visions and lessons, so that you may be of greater help to Me. *I make you partners in My work.* But I have never had and I never have a minute's rest. *Because Evil never rests* and Good must be always active to make void the work of the Enemy as much as possible. We shall rest when the Time is accomplished. *Now we must proceed untiringly, we must work continuously and sacrifice ourselves unremittingly for the harvest of God.*

May My continuous contact sanctify you, may My continuous teaching fortify you and may My fond love for you make you faithful against all snares. Do not be like the old rabbis who taught the Revelation but did not believe in it, to the extent of not being able to recognise the signs of the time and the messengers of God. Ensure that you recognise the precursors of the Christ in His second coming, because the powers of the Antichrist are on the march and, making an exception on the limit I have imposed on Myself, because I know that you drink in certain truths not with a supernatural spirit but out of thirst for human curiosity, I solemnly tell you that what many people think is the victory over the Antichrist, the peace now close at hand (WWII), will be only a pause to give the Enemy of the Christ time to acquire new strength, to dress his wounds and gather his army for a fiercer struggle.

Since you are the “voices” of your Jesus, of the King of kings, of the faithful and truthful king who judges and fights with justice and will defeat the Beast and his servants and prophets, ensure that you know what is your Good and follow it forever. Let no false appearance entice you, let no persecution terrify

you. Let your “voices” repeat My words. Let your lives be devoted to this work. And if on the earth you should share the same destiny as the Christ, as His Precursor and Elijah, a sanguinary destiny or a destiny subjected to moral torture, smile at the future safe destiny you will enjoy with the Christ, with His Precursor and His Prophet.

We shall be equal in our work, in our grief, in our glory. Here I am the Master and the Example. There I shall be the Reward and the King. To have Me will be your blessedness. It will mean forgetting sorrow. It will be what no revelation is yet sufficient to make you understand, because the joy of the future life is by far superior to the possibility of imagination of a human creature still joined to a human body.

349. Lesson to the Disciples after the Transfiguration.

4th December 1945.

They are now once again in the house in Nazareth: or, more precisely, they are scattered on the terrace of the olive-trees, waiting to part and go to rest. And they have lit a little bonfire to illuminate the night, because it is already dark and the moon rises late. It is a warm evening, «even too warm» state the fishermen, who foresee rain. And it is pleasant to be there, all together, the women in the flowery garden round Mary, the men up here; and Jesus on the edge of the terrace, between the two groups, replying to various questions of the disciples, while the women listen attentively. They must have spoken of the lunatic who was cured at the foot of the mountain and they are still making comments.

«It took You to do it!» exclaims His cousin Simon.

«Oh! But those falcons were not convinced even when they saw that their own exorcisers could not do anything, although they admitted that they had used the strongest formulae!» says Solomon, the ferryman, shaking his head. «And even if they tell the scribes their conclusions, they will not persuade them.»

«Of course not! I got the impression that they spoke well, did they not?» asks one whom I do not know.

«Very well. They excluded all demoniac witchcraft from Jesus' power stating

that they felt they were pervaded with a deep peace, when the Master worked the miracle, whereas when it comes from a wicked power, they said that they feel it is painful» replies Hermas.

«However, it was a strong spirit! It did not want to go away! But why did it not always possess the boy? Was it an expelled or lost spirit, or was the boy so holy that he expelled it by himself?» asks another disciple whose name I do not know.

Jesus, without being questioned, replies: «I have explained several times to you that every disease, as it is a torment and a disorder, may conceal Satan and Satan may hide himself in a disease, causing it and making use of it to torture a soul and make it curse God. The boy was ill, *he was not possessed*. He is a pure soul. That is why I was so pleased to free his soul from the most cunning demon who wanted to dominate it and make it impure.»

«In that case, if it was only a simple disease, why did we not succeed in curing it?» asks Judas of Kerioth.

«Of course it is obvious that the exorcisers could not do anything if he was not possessed! But we...» remarks Thomas.

And Judas of Kerioth, who is not prepared to swallow his humiliating failure, as he made several attempts with the child with the only result of getting him into a frenzy if not into a convulsive fit, says: «On the contrary, we seemed to be making things worse. Do you remember, Philip? You were helping me and you heard and saw how he giped at me. He even said to me: “Go away! Of the two of us, you are the worse demon.” Which made the scribes laugh at me behind my back.»

«And were you sorry for that?» asks Jesus with indifference.

«Of course! It is not pleasant to be giped at. And it is not useful when one is Your apostle. One loses one's authority.»

«*When you have God with you, you are authoritative even if the whole World sneers at you*, Judas of Simon.»

«Very well. But increase our power, at least the power of Your apostles, so that we may not suffer such defeats again.»

«It is not right for Me to increase your power and it would be of no avail. You must do that by yourselves, in order to succeed. It is through your insufficiency

that you failed, and also because you diminished what I gave you by means of unholy elements, which you wanted to add hoping to attain greater triumphs.»

«Are You referring to me, Lord?» asks the Iscariot.

«You know whether you deserve it. I am speaking to everybody.»

Bartholomew asks: «Then, what is necessary to cast out such demons?»

«Prayer and fasting. Nothing else is required. *Pray and fast*. And not only in your bodies. It is good for you that your pride has been left devoid of satisfaction. *Satisfied pride makes mind and soul listless and prayer becomes tepid and inert*, just as the body, when it is too full, becomes sleepy and sluggish. And now let us go and have a well deserved rest. Tomorrow morning at dawn, you will all be on the road to Cana, except Manaen and the shepherd disciples. Go. Peace be with you.»

But He keeps Isaac and Manaen and gives them special instructions for the following day, when the women disciples and Mary will begin their Passover pilgrimage with Simon of Alphaeus and Alphaeus of Sarah.

«You will go through Esdraelon, so that Marjiam may see his old grandfather. You will give the peasants the purse that I asked Judas of Kerioth to give you. And with the other purse, which I gave you a short while ago, you will assist any poor people you come across on your way. When you arrive in Jerusalem go to Bethany and tell them to wait for Me at the new moon of Nisan. I will not be very late after that date. I entrust the person Who is dearest to Me and the women disciples to you. But I am not worried as I know they will be safe. Go. We will meet at Bethany and will be together for a long time.»

He blesses them, and while they disappear in the night, He jumps clown into the kitchen garden and goes into the house, in which the women disciples and His Mother are already tying with Marjiam the strings of the travelling bags and arranging everything for their absence, which they do not know how long it will last.

350. The Tribute to the Temple and the Stater in the Mouth of the Fish.

5th December 1945.

The two boats that they took to go back to Capernaum are gliding on an extraordinarily calm lake: a real large slab of blue crystal, which becomes one smooth piece again, as soon as the two boats pass. But they are not the boats of Peter and James, but two boats which they probably hired at Tiberias. And I can hear Judas complaining because he is left without any money after this last expenditure.

«He has seen to everybody else. But what about us? What shall we do now? I was hoping that Chuza... But nothing... We are in the same state as a beggar, one of the many who beg for alms of pilgrims on the roads» he grumbles in a low voice to Thomas.

But the latter replies good-naturedly: «What does it matter, if it is so? I am not at all worried.»

«Of course! But when it is time to eat, you are the one who wants to eat more than anybody else.»

«Certainly! I am hungry. I am brave even in that respect. Well, today instead of asking any man for some bread and a dish of something, I will ask God directly.»

«Today! But tomorrow we shall be in the same situation; and the day after tomorrow it will be the same again; and we are going towards the Decapolis where we are unknown; and they are half-heathens there. And it is not only a question of bread, there are sandals that wear out, and the poor who pester you, and one could be taken ill...»

«And if you go on like this, you will have me as good as dead shortly and you will have to think about my funeral. Oh! how many worries! I... am not worried at all. I am happy and calm, just like a new-born baby.»

Jesus, Who appeared to be engrossed in thought, sitting on the prow almost on the edge, turns round and says in a loud voice to Judas who is astern, but He says it as if He were speaking to everybody: «It is very good to be penniless. The paternity of God will shine more brightly even in the most humble things.»

«Everything has been all right for You recently. It is all right if we cannot work

miracles, it is all right if we get no offerings, it is all right if we have given away everything we had: in a few words, everything is all right... But I feel ill at ease... You are a dear Master, a holy Master, but as far as material life is concerned... You are worth nothing» says Judas without bitterness, as if he were criticising a good young brother, of whose improvident kindness he was proud.

And Jesus replies to him smiling: «It is my greatest quality to be a man worth nothing with regard to material life... And I say again: it is very good to be penniless» and He smiles broadly.

The boat rubs the shingly shore and stops. They land while the other boat comes close and is about to stop. Jesus goes towards the house with Judas, Thomas, Judas and James, Philip and Bartholomew.

Peter lands from the second boat with Matthew, the sons of Zebedee, Simon Zealot and Andrew. But while everybody sets out towards the house, Peter remains on the shore to speak to the boatmen who brought them there and with whom he is perhaps acquainted, and later helps them to set sail. He then puts on his long tunic and walks up the shore towards the house.

While he is crossing the market square two men go towards him and stop him saying: «Listen, Simon of Jonah.»

«I am listening. What do you want?»

«Your Master, only because He is such, does He or does He not pay the two drachmas due to the Temple?»

«Of course He does! Why should He not?»

«Well... because He says that He is the Son of God and...»

«And He is» retorts Peter decidedly and he is already flushing with rage. And he adds: «But, as He is also a son of the Law, and the best son the Law has, He pays His drachmas like every Israelite...»

«We have no proof of that. We are told that He does not pay and we advise Him to do so.»

«H'm» mumbles Peter who is on the point of losing his temper. «H'm... My Master does not need your advice. Go in peace and tell those who have sent you here that the drachmas will be paid at the first opportunity.»

«At the first opportunity!... Why not at once? Who can assure us that He will?

He is always wandering about aimlessly!»

«He cannot pay at once because He is penniless. If you turned Him upside-down, not a penny would drop to the ground. We are all penniless, because we, who are not Pharisees, who are not scribes, who are not Sadducees, who are not rich, who are not spies, who are not asps, we give what we have to the poor, according to His doctrine. Have you understood? And now we have given everything, and until the Most High provides, we can die of starvation, or stand at the street-corner and beg. Inform those who say that He is a glutton also of that. Goodbye!» and he leaves them grumbling and seething with anger.

He goes into the house and upstairs where Jesus is listening to one who begs Him to go to a house on the mountain beyond Magdala, where a man is dying.

Jesus dismisses the man promising to go there at once, and after the man has left, he turns towards Peter, who is sitting in a corner engrossed in thought, and says to him: «What is your opinion, Simon? As a rule, from whom do the kings of the earth take toll or tribute? From their sons or from foreigners?»

Peter starts and says: «How do You know, Lord, what I was going to say to You?»

Jesus smiles making a gesture as if to say: «Never mind»; He then says: «Answer My question.»

«From foreigners, Lord.»

«Well, then, the sons are exempt, as in fact is right. Because a son is of the same blood and household of his father and therefore he must pay only tribute of love and obedience to his father. So I, the Son of the Father, should pay no tribute to the Temple, which is the house of the Father. You gave them the right answer. But as there is a difference between you and them, which is: that you believe that I am the Son of God, while they and those who sent them do not, in order not to scandalise them, I will pay the tribute and at once, while they are still in the square collecting the money.»

«But how, if we have not one penny?» asks Judas, who has approached them with the others. «You can see whether it is necessary to have something!»

«We can ask the landlord to lend it to us» says Philip.

Jesus makes a gesture with His hand commanding silence and says: «Simon of Jonah, go to the beach and cast a line with a strong hook as far as you can. And

as soon as a fish bites, draw the line. It will be a big fish. Open its mouth on the shore and you will find a stater inside it. Take it, go to these two men and pay for Me and for you. Then bring the fish here. We will roast it and Thomas will give us the charity of a little bread. We will eat and then go at once to the man who is dying. James and Andrew: prepare the boats, we will go in them to Magdala and we will walk back in the evening in order not to interfere with the fishing of Zebedee and Simon's brother-in-law.»

Peter goes away and shortly afterwards he is seen climbing onto a half-beached boat; he throws a thin strong line, fitted with a little stone or lead, at the end, to which is attached the real fishing line. The water of the lake forms silvery spray when the weight sinks into it, then it becomes calm again when concentric circles slowly move away...

But shortly afterwards, the little rope which hung loose in Peter's hands, is pulled taut and vibrates... Peter pulls the cord, which is shaken more and more vigorously. With a last jerk the fishing line emerges with the catch that whirls over the fisherman's head and falls on the yellowish sand where it writhes tortured by the hook that rends its palate and by incipient asphyxia.

It is a magnificent fish, the size of a brill weighing at least three kilogrammes. Peter tears the hook from its fleshy lips, thrusts his finger into its throat and pulls out a large silver coin. He lifts it up holding it between his thumb and forefinger to show it to the Master, Who is at the parapet of the terrace. He gathers the thin rope, rolls it up, picks up the fish and runs away towards the square.

All the apostles are dumbfounded... Jesus smiles and says: «And we will thus remove a scandal...»

Peter comes in: «They were coming here. And Eli, the Pharisee is with them. I endeavoured to be as kind as a young girl, and I called them saying: “Hey, messengers of the Fisc! Take this. That's four drachmas, isn't it? Two for the Master and two for me. We are now square, are we not? I will be seeing you in the Valley of Jehoshaphat, particularly you, my dear friend.”

They took offence at my mentioning the “Fisc”. “We are of the Temple, not of the Fisc.” “You collect taxes like excisemen. Every tax collector, as far as I am concerned, is of the Fisc” I replied.

And Eli said to me: “You insolent one! Are you wishing me to die?” “No, my

friend, never! I wish you a pleasant journey to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. Are you not going to Jerusalem for Passover? So we can meet there, my dear friend.”

“I do not wish and I do not want you to take the liberty of calling me your friend.” “In fact it is too big an honour” I replied. And I came away. The amusing side is that half the people of Capernaum were there and they saw that I paid for You and for me. And that old snake will not be able to say anything now.»

The apostles could not help laughing on hearing the story and seeing Peter's miming. Jesus wants to be serious. But a light smile slips from His lips while He says: «You are worse than mustard» and He concludes: «Cook the fish and let us make haste. I want to be back here by sunset.»

351. The Greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. Little Benjamin of Capernaum.

6th December 1945.

And just when the sky and the lake seem to be catching fire in the blazing sunset, they come back towards Capernaum. They are happy. They are speaking to one another. Jesus speaks very little, but He smiles. They point out that if the messenger had given more precise information, they could have saved some of the road. But they also say that it was worth the trouble, because a group of little children had their father cured when death was so close at hand, that his body was already getting cold, and also because they are no longer penniless.

«I told you that the Father would provide for everything» says Jesus.

«And was he an old lover of Mary of Magdala?» asks Philip.

«Apparently... According to what they told us...» replies Thomas.

«What did the man tell You, Lord?» asks Judas of Alphaeus.

Jesus smiles evasively.

«I have seen her with him several times, when I used to go to Tiberias with

friends. I know it for a certainty» states Matthew.

«Yes, brother, tell us... Did the man ask You only to be cured or also to be forgiven?» asks James of Alphaeus.

«What a senseless question! When has the Lord granted a grace without exacting repentance?» says the Iscariot rather angrily to James of Alphaeus.

«My brother has not been speaking nonsense. Jesus cures or casts out demons and then He says: “Go and do not sin any more”» replies Thaddeus.

«Because He has already seen repentance in their hearts» insists the Iscariot.

«In possessed people there is neither repentance nor will to be freed. Not one of them has ever shown any such signs.

If you go over each case, you will see that they either ran away, or they hurled themselves at us in a hostile attitude, or they tried to do both, and they did not succeed only because their relatives held them back» replies Thaddeus.

«And Jesus' power, too» confirms the Zealot.

«So Jesus takes into account the will of relatives who represent the will of the possessed person, who would like to be freed if he were not hindered by the demon.»

«How much subtlety! And what about sinners? I think He uses the same words, even when they are not possessed» says James of Zebedee.

«He said to me: “Follow Me” and I had not said one word to Him, with regard to my situation» remarks Matthew.

«But He read your heart» says the Iscariot, who always wants to be right, at all costs.

«All right! But that, man, who according to public opinion was a big lewd sinner, although not demoniac, or rather not possessed, because with all his sins he must have had a demon as teacher if not as possessor, and he was dying and so on. What did he ask for? I think this is a lot of idle talk... Let us go back to the first question» says Peter.

Jesus satisfies him: «That man wanted to be alone with Me, to be able to speak freely. He did not speak at once about his health... but about his soul. He said: “I am about to die, but actually I am not so ill as I made people believe in order to

have You here quickly. I need to be forgiven by You to be cured. But that is all I need. If You do not want to cure me, I will resign myself. I deserved it. But save my soul” and he confessed his many sins. A nauseating chain of sins...» says Jesus, but His face shines with joy.

«And You are smiling, Master! I am surprised!» remarks Bartholomew.

«Yes, Bartholomew. I am smiling because they no longer exist, and because with his sins I learned also the name of his redeemer. The apostle was a woman in this case.»

«Your Mother!» many of them say. Some say: «Johanna of Chuza! As he often went to Tiberias, perhaps he knows her.» Jesus shakes His head. So they ask Him: «Who was it, then?»

«Mary of Lazarus» replies Jesus.

«Did she come here? Why did she not come to see any of us?»

«She did not come. She wrote to her old partner in sin. I read her letters. They all supplicate him for one thing: to listen to her, to redeem himself, as she redeemed herself, to follow her in Virtue, as he had followed her in sin, and with heart-rending words they beg him to relieve Mary's soul of the remorse of seducing his soul. And she converted him. So much so, that he retired to the country to overcome the temptations of town. His disease, which was more remorse of his soul than physical trouble, completed his preparation for Grace. That is all. Are you happy now? Do you understand now why I am smiling?»

«Yes, Master» they all reply. And when they see that Jesus quickens His steps, to be alone, they begin to whisper to one another...

They are already in sight of Capernaum, when at the junction of their road with the one coming along the lake from Magdala, they meet the disciples, who have come on foot from Tiberias evangelizing. They are all there, with the exception of Marjiam, the shepherds and Manaen, who have gone from Nazareth towards Jerusalem with the women. The disciples are actually more numerous as they have been joined by other fellow-disciples, who have come back from their mission with new proselytes of the Christian doctrine.

Jesus greets them kindly but He immediately stands aloof once again, deeply engrossed in meditation and prayer, a few steps ahead of the others. The apostles, instead, mix with the disciples, particularly with the more influential

ones, that is, Stephen, Hermas, John the priest, John the scribe, Timoneus, Joseph of Emmaus, Ermasteus (who, according to what I understand, is making great progress in the way to perfection), Abel of Bethlehem in Galilee, whose mother is at the rear of the crowd with other women. And the disciples and apostles ask questions and give information on what has happened since they parted. They thus talk of today's curing and conversion, and of the miracle of the stater in the mouth of the fish... And because of the circumstance which brought this miracle about, it rouses the interest of many and the discussion spreads from one row to the next one like fire set to straw...

Jesus says: «You will put here the vision of March 7th, 1944: “Little Benjamin of Capernaum”, without the comment. And you will continue with the rest of the lesson and of the vision. Go on.»

So I am omitting the last sentence: «The vision ends here etc.» It would be out of place as the vision goes on.

7th March 1944.

I see Jesus walking along a country road surrounded and followed by His apostles and disciples.

The calm blue lake of Galilee, which is not far away, shines in the beautiful sunshine of spring or autumn, because the sun is not as strong as in summer. But I would say that it is springtime, because the countryside is very fresh, without the golden tired hues typical of autumn.

As it is getting dark, Jesus seems to be retiring to the hospitable house and He therefore turns His steps towards the village, which is already in sight. As He often does, Jesus is walking a few steps ahead of His disciples. Only two or three steps, not more, to be alone with His thoughts, as He needs tranquillity after evangelizing for a full day. He is absorbed in thought while walking, holding in His hand a green twig, which He must have plucked from some bush and He lightly whips the grass on the edge of the road with it; He is lost in thought.

Behind Him, on the other hand, the disciples have entered into an animated discussion. They are recalling the events of the day and they are rather heavy-

handed in appraising other people's faults and shortcomings. They all criticise more or less severely the fact that those responsible for the collection of the Temple tribute exacted payment from Jesus.

Peter, who is always impulsive, states that it is a sacrilege because the Messiah is not obliged to pay the tribute: «It is asking God to pay Himself» he says. «And it is not right. And if they do not believe that He is the Messiah, it becomes a sacrilege.»

Jesus turns round for a moment and says: «Simon, Simon, there will be many people who will mistrust Me! Also among those who think that their faith in Me is safe and unshakable. Do not judge your brothers, Simon. Always judge yourself first.»

Judas smiling ironically says to Peter, who feels mortified and has lowered his head: «That's for you. Simply because you are the oldest, you always want to play the doctor. It is not true that one's merits are judged according to one's age. Among us there are some who are above you by knowledge and social power.»

They thus enter into discussion on their respective merits. And some boast of being among the first disciples, some base their preferential argument on the influential position they gave up to follow Jesus, and there is who says that no one has the same rights as he has because no one has turned so much by changing from a publican to a disciple. The discussion lasts a long time and if I were not afraid of offending the apostles, I would say that it takes the tone of a real quarrel.

Jesus pays no attention to them. He does not seem to hear them. They have in the meantime reached the first houses of the village, which I know is Capernaum. Jesus proceeds, the others follow Him discussing all the time.

A little boy of seven or eight years runs tripping after Jesus. He overtakes the vociferous group of the apostles and reaches Him.

He is a lovely boy with short curly dark-brown hair. His dark eyes shine intelligently in his little dark face. He calls the Master confidentially as if he were very familiar with Him. He says: «Jesus, will You let me come with You as far as Your house?»

«Does your mother know?» asks Jesus smiling at him kindly.

«Yes, she does.»

«Is it true?» although smiling, Jesus casts a piercing glance at him.

«Yes, Jesus, it is true.»

«Come then.»

The boy jumps for joy and takes the left hand of Jesus Who stretches it out to him. With how much loving reliance the child places his little swarthy hand into Jesus' long hand! I wish I could do the same myself!

«Tell me a nice parable, Jesus» says the boy skipping beside Jesus and looking up at Him, his face shining with joy.

Jesus also looks at him with a cheerful smile, which opens His lips shaded by His moustache and His reddish golden beard, which shines like gold in the sun. His dark sapphire eyes sparkle with joy while He looks at the child.

«What will you do with a parable? It is not a game.»

«It is better than a game. When I go to bed, I think about it then I dream of it and the following day I remember it and I repeated to myself to be good. It makes me good.»

«Do you remember it?»

«Yes, I do. Shall I repeat to you all the ones You told me?»

«You are clever, Benjamin, more clever than men, who forget. As a prize I will tell you a parable.»

The boy no longer hops about. He walks seriously and as gravely as an adult, he does not miss one word or any inflexion of Jesus, Whom he watches carefully, without even worrying where he puts his feet.

«A very good shepherd found out that in a certain place many sheep had been abandoned by bad shepherds, and they were in great danger along rough roads and in harmful pastures, and were wandering about closer and closer to dark ravines. So he went to that place and sacrificing everything he had, he bought the sheep and lambs. He wanted to take them to his own kingdom, because that shepherd was also a king, like many kings in Israel. In his kingdom those sheep and lambs would find wholesome pastures, cool water, safe roads and protected shelter against thieves and wild wolves. So the shepherd gathered all his sheep and lambs together and said to them: "I have come to save you, to take you where you will no longer suffer and where you will find no snares. Love me,

follow me, because I love you so much and I have made every possible sacrifice in order to rescue you. But if you love me, I will not regret my sacrifice. Follow me and let us go.” And they set out towards the kingdom of happiness, the shepherd before then, and the sheep after him. The shepherd turned round every moment to make sure that the sheep were following him, to exhort those which were tired, to encourage the ones which were downhearted, to assist the sick ones and to caress the little lambs. How much he loved them! He used to give them his bread and salt, and he always tasted the water of fountains first, to make sure that it was good and he blessed it to make it holy. But the sheep – would you believe it, Benjamin? – the sheep became tired. First one, then two, then ten, then one hundred remained behind grazing and stuffing themselves with so much grass that they could no longer move, and they lay down in the dust and mud when they were tired and full. Some went close to the brinks of precipices, notwithstanding that the shepherd said to them: “Don't do that”; and as he stood near the most dangerous places to prevent them from going there, some bumped into him trying to make him fall into the precipice and they did that several times. And thus many fell into ravines and died miserably. Some butted each other and killed each other. Only one little lamb never went astray. It ran about bleating as if to say to the shepherd: “I love you”; it always ran behind the good shepherd and when they arrived at the gates of his kingdom, they were the only two: the shepherd and the little faithful lamb. Then the shepherd did not say: “go in”, but he said: “come” and he took it in his arms, close to his chest, and he took it inside calling all his subjects and saying to them: “Here. This little lamb loves me. I want it to be with me forever. And you must love it because it is the pet of my heart.” And that is the end of the parable, Benjamin. Now can you tell Me: who is that good shepherd?»

«It's You, Jesus.»

«And who is the little lamb?»

«It's me, Jesus.»

«But I will be going away now. You will forget Me.»

«No, Jesus. I will not forget You because I love You.»

«Your love will come to an end when you no longer see Me.»

«I will repeat to myself the words that You spoke to me and it will be the same as if You were present. I will love You and obey You thus. And tell me, Jesus:

Will You remember Benjamin?»

«Always.»

«And how will You remember?»

«I will say to Myself that you promised to love and obey Me and I will thus remember you.»

«And will You give me Your Kingdom?»

«I will, if you are good.»

«I will be good.»

«What will you do? Life is long.»

«But Your words are very good, too. If I repeat them to myself and I do what they say I should do, I will be good all my life. And I will do that because I love You. *When one loves, it is not difficult to be good.* I do not find it difficult to obey my mother, because I love her. *And it will not be difficult for me to obey You, because I love You.*»

Jesus stops and looks at the little face, which is lit by love more than by the sun. Jesus' joy is so deep that another sun seems to be burning in His soul and shining through His eyes. He bends and kisses the forehead of the child.

He has stopped near a humble house with a well in front. Jesus sits down near the well where He is joined by the disciples, who are still arguing over their prerogatives.

Jesus looks at them. Then He calls them: «Come here, round Me and listen to the last lesson of the day, you who have shouted yourselves hoarse celebrating your own merits and believe that you will gain a position according to them. See this child? He is in the truth more than you are. His innocence gives him the key to open the gates of My Kingdom. In his simplicity of a child, he has understood that the strength necessary to become great lies in love and that obedience practised with love is required to enter My Kingdom. Be simple and humble, be affectionate not to Me only, but to one another, obey My words, all of them, also the ones I am speaking to you now, if you wish to reach the place that these innocent souls will enter. Learn from the little ones. The Father reveals the truth to them, but He does not reveal it to the wise.»

Jesus is speaking holding Benjamin against His knees, with His hands on the

boy's shoulders. Jesus' countenance is majestic. He is serious, not angry, but grave. As it becomes a Master. His fairhaired head is a blaze of light in the last sunbeams.

The vision ends here leaving me full of sweet happiness notwithstanding my sorrows.

[vision of 6th December 1945 resumed].

So, the disciples have not been able to go into the house. This was natural because of their number and out of respect. They never go in unless they are all invited, or one in particular is invited by the Master. I notice in them great respect and reservedness, notwithstanding the kindness of the Master and His long lasting familiarity. Even Isaac, who I can say is the first disciple, never takes the liberty of approaching Jesus unless he is called by the Master with at least a smile.

Somewhat different, is it not? to the rash almost farcical manner in which many people deal with what is supernatural... This is my comment and I feel that it is correct, because I cannot suffer people to treat what is above us with manners that we would not use for men like ourselves, if they are only a little better than we are... Well!... And let us go on...

The disciples are scattered on the shore of the lake to buy fish and bread and whatever is necessary for supper. James of Zebedee comes back and calls the Master, Who is sitting on the terrace with John crouched at His feet in loving conversation... Jesus stands up and leans over the parapet.

James says: «How much fish, Master! My father says that You blessed the nets by coming here. Look: this is for us» and he shows a basket full of silvery fish.

«May God grant him grace for his generosity. Prepare it, because after supper we will go on the shore with the disciples.»

They do so. The lake is black at night, waiting for the moon, which rises late. And rather than see it, one can hear it grumble and lap on the shingly shore. Only the exceptionally bright stars of eastern countries are mirrored in calm waters. They sit in a circle round an upturned boat on which Jesus has sat. And the little lamps of boats placed in the centre of the circle hardly illuminate the faces closer to them. Jesus' face is lit up from below by a lantern placed near His

feet, and thus everybody can see Him well, while He talks to this one or that one. At first it is a simple home-like conversation. But it soon takes the tone of a lesson. Jesus says so openly: «Come and listen. We shall be parting shortly and I wish to instruct you to perfect you further.

I heard you dispute today, and not always charitably. I have already given the seniors among you the lesson, but I want to give it to you as well, and it will do the seniors no harm to hear it again. Little Benjamin is no longer here, standing against My knees. He is sleeping in his bed and dreaming his innocent dreams. But perhaps his innocent soul is here among us just the same. But imagine that he, or some other boy, is here, as an example for you.

Each of you has in his heart a fixed idea, a curiosity, a danger. That is: to be the first in the Kingdom of Heaven; to know who the first will be; and at last the danger: the still human desire to hear the reply: “You are the first in the Kingdom of Heaven” uttered by your obliging companions or by the Master, above all by the Master, of Whose veracity and knowledge of the future you are aware. Is it not so? The questions tremble on your lips and dwell in the depth of your hearts.

Your Master, for your own good, yields to that curiosity, although He loathes giving assent to human curiosity. Your Master is not a charlatan whom one can ask questions for a few coins in the uproar of a market. Neither is He possessed by the spirit of the Python, which assists Him in making money by divining, to comply with the narrow-mindedness of man who wants to know the future in order to decide how “to act.” *Man cannot act wisely by himself. God will assist him if man has faith in Him!* And it is of no avail to know the future, or to think that one knows it, if one has no means to avert the prophesied future. *There is one means only: to pray the Father and Lord that His mercy may assist us.* I solemnly tell you *that a confident prayer can change punishment into blessings.* But he who has recourse to men in order to avert the future, as a man and with human means, cannot pray at all, or prays very badly. As this curiosity may teach you a good lesson, I will reply to it for this once, although I abhor curious and disrespectful questions.

You are asking: “Which of us will be the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?”

I do not take into consideration the limitation “of us” and I extend the frontiers to the whole present and future world and I reply: “*He is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven, who is the least among men.*” That is: he who is considered

“the least” by men: the simple, the humble, the trustful, the unaware. *That is a child, or he who can make his soul be like the soul of a child once again.* Neither science, nor power, nor wealth, nor industry, not even good industry, will make you “the greatest” in the blessed Kingdom. *It is necessary to be like children with regard to loving kindness, humility, simplicity, faith.*

Watch how children love Me, and imitate them. How they believe in Me, and imitate them. How they remember what I say, and imitate them. How they do what I teach them, and imitate them. How they do not pride themselves on what they do, and imitate them. How they do not become jealous of Me and of their companions, and imitate them. I solemnly tell you that if you do not change your ways of thinking, of acting and of loving, and you do not remould them on the pattern of children, you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven. They know the essential elements of My doctrine, as you know them, *but how differently they practise what I teach!* For every good action you accomplish, you say: “I did that.” A child says to Me: “I remembered You today, I obeyed for Your sake, I loved, I refrained from quarrelling... and I am happy, because I know that *You are aware when I am good and You are pleased.*” And watch children when they are at fault. How humbly they confess: “Today I was naughty. And I am sorry because I grieved You.” And they do not find excuses. They know that I know. They believe. *They are sorry because I am sorry.*

Oh! How dear children are to My heart: there is no pride, no duplicity, no lust in them! I tell you once again: *become like children* if you wish to enter My Kingdom. *Love children, as they are angelical examples still at your disposal.* Because you ought to be like angels. As an excuse you may say: “We do not see angels.” But God gives you children as examples, and you have children amongst you. *And if you see a child who is physically or morally forlorn and who may perish, welcome him in My Name, because they are greatly loved by God.* And he who welcomes a child in My Name, welcomes Me, because I am in the innocent souls of children. And he who welcomes Me, welcomes Him Who sent Me, the Most High.

And beware lest you should scandalise one of these little ones, whose eyes see God. You must never scandalise anybody. But woe betide three times those who soil the innocent purity of children! *Let them be like angels as long as possible.* The world and flesh are too repugnant to souls coming from Heaven! And a child, through his innocence, is still entirely a soul. Respect the soul of a child and his body as you respect a sacred place. *And a child is sacred also because*

he has God within himself. The temple of the Spirit is in every body. But the temple of a child is the most sacred and intimate, it is beyond the double Veil. *Do not even allow the wind of your passions to shake the curtains of their unawareness of concupiscence.*

I would like a child in every family, among every gathering of people, to check the passions of men. *A child sanctifies, brings solace and freshness through the simple glance of his innocent eyes.* But woe to those who despoil children of their holiness through their scandalous behaviour! Woe betide those who teach children wickedness through their debauchery! Woe betide those who by means of their words and irony injure the faith children have in Me! It would be better if a millstone were tied round the neck of each of them and they were thrown into the sea to be drowned together with their scandal. *Woe to the world that scandalises such innocent souls!* There must indeed be scandals, but alas for the man who provides them.

No one is entitled to do violence to his body or to his life. Because life and body are given to us by God and He only is entitled to take them entirely or in part. I tell you that if your hand causes you to sin, it is better that you cut it off, and if your foot causes you to give scandal, it is better if you cut it off. It is better for you to enter into Life crippled or lame, than to be thrown into eternal fire with two hands and two feet. And if it is not sufficient to have one hand or foot cut off, have also the other hand or foot cut off, so that you may no longer scandalise, but you may have time to repent before being thrown into the unquenchable fire, which tortures like a worm forever. And if your eye should cause you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better to be one-eyed, than be in hell with both eyes. With one eye or without eyes you could see in Heaven the Light, whereas with two scandalous eyes you would see darkness and horror in hell. And nothing else.

Remember that. Do not scandalise the little ones, do not despise them, do not deride them. They are worth more than you are, because their angels always see God, Who tells them the truth to be revealed to children and to those whose hearts are like those of children. And love one another like children, without disputes and without pride. And be at peace with one another. Be peaceful-minded towards everybody. You are brothers, in the name of the Lord, not enemies. There must be no enmity among Jesus' disciples. The only Enemy is Satan. Be his fierce enemies and join battle with him and with the sins that install Satan in the hearts of men.

Be tireless in fighting Evil, whichever form it may take. And be patient. There is no limit to the activity of an apostle, because there is no limit to the activity of Evil. The demon never says: "That is enough. I am tired now and I am going to rest." He is indefatigable. He passes from one man to another as quick as thought, and even quicker, and he tempts and takes, he seduces and tortures and gives no peace. He attacks treacherously and demolishes, if one is not more than vigilant. At times he installs himself as conqueror, encouraged by the weakness of the person he assails, at times he enters as a friend, because the prey he is after, already lives as an ally of the Enemy. Sometimes, when he is cast out of a man, he wanders around and assaults a better prey to avenge himself for the affront suffered at the hands of God or of a servant of God. But you must say what he says: "I will not rest." He does not rest in order to people hell. You must not rest in order to people Paradise. Give him no quarter. I foretell you that the more you fight him the more he will make you suffer. But you must not worry about that. He can overrun the earth, but he cannot enter Heaven. So he will not be able to trouble you there and all those who have fought him will be in Heaven...»

Jesus stops abruptly and asks: «Why are you worrying John? What do they want from you?»

John blushes and Bartholomew, Thomas and the Iscariot lower their heads seeing that they have been found out.

«Well?» asks Jesus peremptorily.

«Master, my companions want me to tell You something.»

«Tell Me, then.»

«Today, when You were with the sick man, and we were going round the village, as You told us, we saw a man, who is not a disciple of Yours, and whom we have never seen among those who listen to Your sermons, and he was casting out demons in Your name, in a group of pilgrims going to Jerusalem. And he was successful. He cured a man who trembled so much as to be unable to work, and he made a girl recover the use of speech, which she had lost, because she was assailed in a forest by a demon in the form of a dog, which had tied her tongue. He said: "Go away, cursed demon, in the name of the Lord Jesus, the Christ, the King of the issue of David, the King of Israel. He is the Saviour and the Winner. Flee before His Name!" and the demon really fled. We resented that and we told him that he was not allowed to do so. He said to us:

"Am I doing anything wrong? I honour the Christ by clearing His way from demons who are not worthy to see Him." We replied: "You are not an exorciser according to Israel and you are not a disciple of Christ. You are not allowed to do that." He said: "One is always allowed to do good things" and he rebelled against our order saying: "And I will continue to do what I am doing." That is what they wanted me to tell You, particularly because You just said that all those who fight Satan will be in Heaven.»

«All right. That man will be one of them. He was right and you were wrong. *The ways of the Lord are infinite and it is not true that only those who take the straight road arrive in Heaven.* Everywhere, at all times, in countless different ways, there will be people who will come to Me, *even along initially wrong ways. But God will see their good intentions and will lead them on to the right way.* Likewise there will be some who through treble concupiscent inebriation will leave the good way to take one that will lead them far away and mislead them all together. So you must *never judge your fellow-men.* God only sees. *Endeavour never to leave the right way, on which the will of God more than your own put you. And when you see one who believes and acts in My Name, do not call him stranger, enemy, or say that he is sacrilegious.* He is a friendly faithful subject of Mine, because he believes spontaneously in My Name, and he believes more than many among you. That is why My Name on his lips works miracles like yours, and perhaps greater than yours. God loves him because he loves Me and will end by taking him to Heaven. *No one who works miracles in My name can be My enemy or speak ill of Me. On the contrary he honours the Christ and bears witness to faith. I solemnly tell you that belief in My Name is sufficient to save your souls. Because My Name is Salvation.* So I say to you: if you see him again, do not hinder him. But call him "brother", because he is such, even if he is still outside the enclosure of My Fold. *He who is not against Me, is with Me. He who is not against you, is with you.*»

«Have we sinned, Lord?» asks John sorrowfully.

«No. You acted out of ignorance, but without malice. So there is no sin. But, since you are now aware of the situation, it would be a sin in future. And now let us go home. Peace be with you.»

The dictation that follows the vision of little Benjamin (7.3.44) can put here at the end of today's vision. As you wish.

[dictation on 7th March 1944]

Jesus then says:

«I will tell you also, what I told My little disciple. *The Kingdom belongs to the faithful lambs who love and follow Me without getting lost in allurements.* They love Me till the end.

And I say to you what I said to My senior disciples: “Learn from the little ones.” The fact that you are learned, rich, bold, will not make you conquer the Kingdom of Heaven. Not if you are so from a human point of view. *But you will conquer it, if you are supernaturally learned, rich and bold through the knowledge and practice of love.* How love does enlighten one to understand the Truth! How it makes one rich to conquer it! How bold it makes one to conquer it! How much confidence and certainty it inspires!

Behave like little Benjamin, My little flower who scented My heart that evening and sang angelical music, which overwhelmed the scent of humanity seething in the disciples, and the noise of human altercations.

And do you wish to know what happened later to Benjamin? He remained the little lamb of Christ, and when he lost his Great Shepherd, Who had gone back to Heaven, he became a disciple of the one who was more like Me, by whom he was baptised with the name of Stephen, My first martyr. He was faithful unto death and so were his relatives, conquered to Faith by their little apostle. Is he not known? Many people are known to Me in My Kingdom, but they are unknown to men. And they are happy for that. Worldly fame does not add even a tiny spark to the glory of the blessed souls.

Little John, always walk with your hand in Mine. You will proceed safely and when you arrive at the Kingdom I will not say to you: “Go in” but “Come” and I will take you in My arms to put you where My love has prepared a place for you and that your love has deserved.

Go in peace. I bless you.»

352. Second Miracle of the Loaves.

28th May 1944, Whit Sunday, 2 a.m.

A tranquil vision. I see a place which is neither a plain nor a mountain. There are some mountains to the east, but they are rather far away. Then there is a little valley and minor flat risings of ground, like grass-grown tablelands. They seem to be the lower slopes of a group of hills. The ground is rather parched and bare here is only short sparse grass scattered over the stony ground. Here and there is a small group of very low thorny bushes. The horizon opens wide and bright to the west. I can see nothing else. It is still daylight, but I would say that evening is approaching, because the western sky is red in the sunset, whilst the mountains to the east are already violaceous in the incipient twilight. Deep crevices also look darker in the fading light, while higher parts are tinged with violet.

Jesus is standing on a large stone speaking to a very huge crowd dispersed on the tableland. His disciples are around Him. From His high position He dominates the crowds of people of every age and social condition around Him.

He must have worked some miracles because I hear Him say: «You must praise and be grateful to Him Who sent Me, not to Me. And your praise must not come from inattentive lips like the sound of rustling wind. True praise rises from your hearts and is the true feeling of your hearts. And it is pleasing to God. Let those who have been cured love the Lord faithfully. And the relatives of those who have been cured must love Him likewise. Do not misuse the gift of your recovered health. Fear more the diseases of your souls than those of your bodies. And do not sin. Because *every sin is a disease.* And some of them may bring about death. So, all of you who are now rejoicing, do not destroy the blessings of the Lord by committing sin. Your joy would come to an end, because evil deeds destroy peace, and *where there is no peace, there is no joy.* But be holy and perfect, as the Father wants you to be, because He loves you and He wants to give a Kingdom to those whom He loves. But only those who are perfect through their loyalty to the Law will enter His holy Kingdom. May the peace of God be with you.»

And Jesus lapses into silence. He crosses His arms on His chest and watches the crowds around Him. He then looks around, at the clear sky, which is becoming darker and darker in the fading light. He is pensive. He comes down from the large stone. He says to His disciples: «I feel sorry for these people. They have

followed Me for three days. They have no more food supplies with them and we are far from any village. I am afraid that the weaker ones would suffer too much, if I send them away without feeding them.»

«And how do You want to do that, Master? You said it Yourself, that we are far from every village. Where can we find bread in this lonely place? And who would give us so much money to buy enough for everybody?»

«Have you not got any with you?»

«We have a few fish and some pieces of bread. What was left over from our meal. But it is not enough for anybody. If You give it to those who are near You, there will be a riot. You will deprive us and not help anybody» says Peter.

«Bring Me what you have.»

They bring a little basket with seven pieces of bread. They are not whole loaves. They look like thick slices of a large loaf. The little fish are a handful of tiny things burnt on the fire.

«Make the crowds sit down in groups of fifty people and tell them to be calm and quiet if they want to eat.»

The disciples, either climbing on stones or going round among the crowds, busy themselves to arrange the people as requested by Jesus. By dint of great efforts, they are successful. Some of the children whimper because they are hungry or sleepy, some whine because their mothers or some relatives have given them a slap to make them obey.

Jesus takes the bits of bread, not all of them: one in each hand, He offers them, puts them down and blesses them. He takes the little fish, they are so few that they are contained in the hollow of His long hands. He offers them, too, puts them down and blesses them.

«And now take them, go round the crowd and give everybody plenty.»

The disciples obey.

Jesus, standing, watches them and smiles: His white figure dominates the people sitting in wide circles all over the tableland.

The disciples move farther and farther, handing the food out all the time. And the basket is always full of food. The people eat while night falls and there is total silence and a great peace.

Jesus says:

«And this is another thing which will annoy difficult doctors: the application of this evangelical vision. I will not make you mediate on My power and kindness, or on the faith and obedience of the disciples. Nothing of that. I want to show you the analogy of the episode with the work of the Holy Spirit.

See: *I give My word*. I give everything you can understand and assimilate to nourish your souls. But you have been made so dull by fatigue and inanition that you cannot assimilate all the nourishment which is in My word. You would need so much of it. But you are not able to receive much. You are so poor in spiritual strength! It burdens you without giving you blood or strength. *And the Spirit then works the miracle for you. The spiritual miracle of the multiplication of the Word*. It enlightens for you, and thus multiplies all its most secret meanings, so that you can feed on it and thus not collapse exhausted along the desert of life, thus you do not have to encumber yourselves with a load that would crush you without strengthening you.

Seven pieces of bread and a few fish!

I preached for three years and, as My beloved John says, “if all the parables I told and all the miracles I worked were to be written to give you substantial food, capable of taking you as far as the Kingdom, without fainting through weakness, the whole Earth would not suffice to contain all the volumes.” *And even if all that had been written, you could not have read so many books*. You do not even read, as you ought to, the little which has been written about Me. And it is the only thing you should know, as you have known the more necessary words since your childhood.

So Love comes and multiplies. He, too, Who is One with Me and the Father, “feels sorry for you who are dying from starvation” and with a miracle that is being repeated throughout centuries, He multiplies twice, ten times, a hundred times the nourishment of each word of Mine. You thus have an infinite treasure of celestial food. It is offered to you by *the Charity*. Draw from it without fear. *The more you draw from it, the more it will grow, as it is the fruit of Love*.

God has no limit in His wealth and possibilities. You are relative. He is not. He is infinite. In all His works. *Also in His power to give you, every moment and for every event, the light you need, in any particular moment*. And as on the day of Pentecost the Spirit, infused in the apostles, made their word understandable

to Parthians, Medians, Scythians, Cappadocians, to the inhabitants of Pontus, to Phrygians, and made it like their mother tongues to Egyptians, Romans, Greeks and Libyans, so it will comfort you when you weep, will advise you when you ask for advice, it will share your joy when you rejoice, through the same Word.

Oh! if the Spirit elucidates to you the sentence: “Go in peace and do not sin”, those words are really a reward for those who have not sinned, they are encouragement for those who are still weak but do not want to sin, they are forgiveness for repentant souls, and mild merciful reproach for those who show only a shadow of repentance. And it is only a sentence. And one of the most simple ones. But how many there are in My Gospel! How many, which, like flower buds after a shower and springtime sunshine, open in large numbers on the branch where there was only one, and cover it all, to the joy of those who admire it.

Rest now. The peace of Love be with you.»

353. The Bread from Heaven.

7th December 1945.

The vision of the second miracle of the loaves given on 28th May 1944 and relevant dictation are to be put before the vision of 7th December.

The beach at Capernaum is crowded with people disembarking from a flotilla of boats of all sizes. And the first to land spread among the crowds looking for the Master, or an apostle or at least a disciple. And they ask after them...

A man at last replies: «The Master? The apostles? No, they are not here. They went away immediately after the Sabbath and have not come back. But they will come back, because some of the disciples are here. I spoke just now to one of them. He must be an important disciple. He speaks as well as Jairus! He went along the coast towards that house in the fields.»

The man who asked the question, spreads the news and they all rush towards the house. But after about two hundred metres they meet on the beach a group of

disciples coming towards Capernaum gesticulating animatedly. They greet them and ask: «Where is the Master?»

The disciples reply: «During the night, after the miracle, He went with His disciples by boat to the other side of the sea. We saw the sails in the moonlight going towards Dalmanuta.»

«Ah! We looked for Him at Magdala, at Mary's house, but He was not there! However... the fishermen of Magdala should have told Us!»

«They probably did not know. He may have gone up the Arbela mountains to pray. He has been there before, last year, before Passover. I met Him then, by the great grace of the Lord to His poor servant» says Stephen.

«But is He not coming back here?»

«He will certainly come back. He has to give us instructions before sending us away. But what do you want?»

«We want to hear Him again, to follow Him and become His disciples.»

«He will be going to Jerusalem. You will find Him there. And in the House of God, the Lord will speak to you and you will know whether you ought to follow Him. Because you must know that, although He does not reject anybody, there are tendencies in us which reject the Light. Now, he who has so many of them as to be not only saturated with them – which is not a great evil because He is Light and when we firmly decide to become His loyal followers His Light penetrates into us and overwhelms darkness but to be also deeply attached to them, as to one's own body, then it is better for him to refrain from coming, unless he is prepared to demolish his old being and form a completely new one. Consider, therefore, whether you have the strength to take on a new spirit, a new way of thinking and wanting. Pray in order to see the truth concerning your vocation. Then come, if you should so decide. And may the Most High, Who guided Israel in the “passage”, guide you also in this “Pesach”, so that you may follow in the wake of the Lamb, from the desert, towards the eternal Earth, the Kingdom of God» says Stephen, speaking on behalf of all his companions.

«No, no! Now! At once! No one does what He does. We want to follow Him» shout the crowds in tumult.

Stephen smiles meaningly. He opens his arms and says: «Do you want to come because He gave you plenty good bread? Do you think that in future He will

give you only that? *He promises His followers what is His own lot: sorrow, persecution, martyrdom.* Not roses, but thorns; not caresses, but slaps; not bread but stones are awaiting the followers of Christ. And I say so without becoming a blasphemer, because *His true followers will be anointed with the holy oil made by His Grace and His suffering; and we shall be "anointed" to be the victims on the altar and the kings in Heaven.*»

«Well? Are you jealous perhaps? If you are there, we want to be there as well. The Master belongs to everybody.»

«All right. I told you because I love you and I want you to know what it means to be "disciples", so that you may not become deserters later. Let us now go all together and wait for Him at His house. The sun is already setting and the Sabbath is about to begin. He will come to spend it here before departing.»

And they go towards the town, talking. And many ask Stephen and Hermas, who has joined them, many questions, as they are both placed in a very favourable light in the eyes of the Israelites, because they are Gamaliel's dearest pupils. Many ask: «But what does Gamaliel say about Him?», and some: «Did he send you?», and some: «Did he not regret losing you?», or: «What does the Master say of the great rabbi?»

The two disciples reply patiently: «Gamaliel speaks of Jesus of Nazareth as of the greatest man in Israel.»

«What? Greater than Moses?» exclaim some, who are almost scandalised.

«He says that Moses is one of the many precursors of the Christ. But he is only the servant of the Christ.»

«So, according to Gamaliel, this man is the Christ? Is that what he says? If rabbi Gamaliel says that, the matter is settled. He is the Christ!»

«He does not say that. He cannot yet believe that, unfortunately for him. But he says that the Christ is on the earth, because he spoke to Him many years ago. Both he and wise Hillel. And he is waiting for the sign that Christ promised him so that he may recognise Him» says Hermas.

«But how could he believe that that man was the Christ? What did He do? I am as old as Gamaliel, but I never heard of anyone doing the things that the Master does. If he is not convinced by these miracles, what miracles did he see in that Christ that he believed in Him?»

«He saw Him anointed with the Wisdom of God. So he says» replies Hermas once again.

«Well, then, what is this one according to Gamaliel?»

«The greatest man, master and precursor in Israel. If he could say: "He is the Christ", the wise and just soul of my first master would be saved» says Stephen and he concludes: «And I pray that that may happen, at all costs.»

«But if he does not believe that He is the Christ, why did he send you to Him?»

«We wanted to come. He let us come saying that it was a good thing.»

«Perhaps he wanted to find out things and report them to the Sanhedrin...» insinuates one.

«Man, what are you saying? Gamaliel is honest. He does not play the spy for anybody, and particularly for the enemies of an innocent person!» objects Stephen and he is so indignant and almost beaming with holy indignation that he looks like an archangel.

«But he must have been sorry to lose you» states another man.

«He was and was not. As a man who was fond of us, yes. As a very righteous spirit, no. Because he said: "He is greater than I am and younger than I am. So I will be able to breathe my last peacefully, as far as your future is concerned, as I know that you are with the 'Master of masters'."»

«And what does Jesus of Nazareth say of the great rabbi?»

«Oh! He speaks but highly of him!»

«Is He not envious of him?»

«God does not envy» replies Hermas severely.

«Do not make sacrilegious suppositions.»

«So He is God according to you. Are you sure?»

And the two reply together: «As we are sure that we are alive just now.» And Stephen concludes: «And believe it yourselves if you wish to possess eternal Life.»

From the beach they go into the square, which they cross going towards the house. Jesus is at the door caressing some children.

The disciples and some curious people crowd round Him asking: «Master, when did You come?»

«A few minutes ago.» Jesus' countenance is still as majestically solemn, somewhat ecstatic, as when He has been engrossed in prayer for a long time.

«Have You been praying, Master?» asks Stephen in a low voice out of respect, and for the same reason he has stooped.

«Yes, I have. What makes you understand that, My son?» asks Jesus laying His hand on the disciple's dark hair with a kind caress.

«Your angelical face. I am a poor man, but the expression of Your face is so clear that one can read on it the emotions and deeds of Your spirit.»

«Yours also is clear. You are one of those who remain children...»

«And what is there on my face, Lord?»

«Come aside and I will tell you» and Jesus takes him by the wrist and leads him into a dark corridor. «Charity, faith, purity, generosity, wisdom; God gave them to you and you have improved them and you will do so even more in future. Finally, in accordance with your name, you have a crown: it is of pure gold with a large gem glittering in front. On the gold and on the gem there are two expressions engraved: "Predestination" and "Early Fruit". Be worthy of your destiny, Stephen. Go in peace with My blessing.» And once again He rests His hand on Stephen's dark hair while he kneels down and bends to kiss His feet.

They go back to the others. «These people have come to hear You...» says Philip. «It is not possible to speak here. Let us go to the synagogue. Jairus will be pleased.»

They go to the beautiful synagogue of Capernaum: Jesus leads the way and is followed by the procession of all the others. Jairus greets Him and He enters, giving instructions to leave all the doors open, so that those who cannot go inside may hear Him from the street and square beside the synagogue.

Jesus goes to His place, in the friendly synagogue, in which, fortunately, there are no Pharisees today. They have probably already left for Jerusalem in full plumage. And He begins to speak.

«I solemnly tell you: You are looking for Me not to hear Me or because of the miracles which you have seen, but because of the bread that I gave you to eat to

your fill and without any expense. That is why three quarters of you were looking for Me, and also out of curiosity and that is why you came from every part of our Fatherland. So there is no supernatural spirit in your quest, dominated by human spirit with its unsound curiosities or at least with childish curiosity, not because it is simple like that of children, but because it is maimed like the intelligence of a dull-minded person. And linked to such curiosity there is sensuality and vitiated feeling. *Sensuality, as subtle as the demon whose daughter it is, hides behind appearances and seemingly good deeds, and vitiated feeling is simply a morbid deviation of sentiment.* And like everything which is "disease" it needs and craves after drugs, which are not plain food, good bread, good water, unadulterated oil, the first milk which is sufficient to live and live well. *Vitiated feeling needs extraordinary things to be roused, to feel the thrill of pleasure, the sickly thrill of paralysed people who need drugs to feel the sensation, which beguiles them into believing that they are still healthy and virile.* The sensuality that wants to satisfy one's gluttony without work, in this case, with bread which was not hard-earned, but given by God's bounty.

The gifts of God are not common ordinary things, they are special ones. One cannot claim them nor can one become lazy and say: "God will give them to me." It is written: "You shall eat bread moistened with the sweat of your forehead", that is the bread earned through hard work. If He Who is Mercy said: "I feel sorry for these people, who have followed Me for three days and have nothing left to eat and may faint on the way before they reach Hippo on the lake, or Gamala, or any other town", and He provided accordingly, that does not imply that He is to be followed just because of that. I am to be followed for much more than a little bread, which becomes excrement after it is digested. I am to be followed not for the food that fills the stomach, but for that which nourishes the soul. Because you are not only animals, which must browse and ruminate, or grout and get fat. You are souls! That is what you are! Your body is the garment, your being is the soul. It is the soul that lasts. Your body, like every garment, wears out and comes to an end and it is not worth taking care of it as if it were something perfect, deserving every care.

Seek, therefore, what is just to attain, not what is unjust. Endeavour to get not the food that does perish, but that which lasts for eternal life. The Son of man will always give it to you, whenever you want it. Because the Son of man has at His disposal everything that comes from God, and He can give it; He is the Master, the generous Master of the treasures of the Father God, Who has impressed His seal on Him so that no honest eye may be confused. *And if you*

have the food that does not perish, you will be able to do the works of God, having been nourished with the food of God.»

«What shall we do, to work the deeds of God? We keep the Law and respect the Prophets. Thus we are already nourished with the food of God and we do the works of God.»

«That is true. You keep the Law. Or better still: *you “know” the Law. But to know is not to practise.* For instance, we know the laws of Rome, but no faithful Israelite puts them into practise, except in those specific cases when he is compelled to do so as a subject. Otherwise, I am referring to faithful Israelites, we do not put into practise the heathen customs of the Romans, although we know them. *The Law which you know and the Prophets should, in fact, nourish you with God and make you capable of working the deeds of God.* But in order to do so, *they should have become one thing with you,* like the air you breathe and the food you assimilate, which become your life and your blood. Instead they are like strangers to you, although they belong to your house, just like an object in the house, which is known and useful to you, but will not interfere with your life if it were lost. But try not to breathe for a few minutes, or to go without food for days... and you will see that you cannot live. And that is how your ego should feel in your malnutrition and asphyxia of the Law and Prophets, known to you but not assimilated and thus not all one with you. This is what I have come to teach you and to give you: *the juice, the air of the Law and of the Prophets, to give blood and breath back to your souls dying from inanition and asphyxia.* You are like children whom a disease has made unable to tell what can nourish them. You have plenty food in front of you, but you do not know that it must be eaten to be changed into something vital, that is, that it must really become part of us, through pure generous loyalty to the Law of the Lord, Who spoke to Moses and the Prophets on behalf of all of you. *It is your duty, therefore, to come to Me to receive the air and juice of eternal Life. But that duty presupposes faith in you.* Because if one has no faith, one cannot believe My words, and if one does not believe, one cannot come to Me and say: “Give me the true bread.” And if you do not have the true bread, you cannot work the deeds of God, because you are unable to do them. *So in order to be nourished by God and to work the deeds of God, you must do the basic work, which is: to believe in Him Whom God sent.»*

«But what miracles do You work that we may believe that You have been sent by God and we may see the seal of God upon You? What do You do, which the

Prophets have not already done, although in a more modest form? Nay, Moses exceeded You, because he fed our ancestors with wonderful food not once, but for forty years. It is in fact written that our forefathers ate manna in the desert for forty years, and it is written that Moses gave them the bread of heaven to eat, as he was able to do so.»

«You are wrong. *Not Moses but the Lord was able to do so.* And in Exodus we read: “Now I will rain down bread from the heavens. Let the people go out and gather what is sufficient for each day, so that I may test whether the people will follow My law or not. And on the sixth day they will gather twice as much, out of respect for the seventh day, which is the Sabbath.” And the Hebrews every morning saw the desert become covered with that “delicate thing that resembles what is pounded in a mortar and is like hoarfrost and coriander seed and has the lovely taste of flour kneaded with honey.” So it was not Moses but God who supplied manna. God can do everything. He can punish and bless. He can grant and take away. *And I tell you that He always prefers to bless and grant rather than punish and take away.*

God, as the Book of Wisdom states, out of love for Moses – who, according to Ecclesiasticus, “was beloved by God and men, of blessed memory, and was made by God the equal of the holy ones in glory, and strong to the terror of his enemies, and was able to work miracles and stop them, and was raised high in the respect of kings, and was His minister before the people, and saw the glory of God and heard the voice of the Most High, and was the guardian of the precepts and of the Law of life and science” – God, I was saying, out of love for Moses, nourished His people with the bread of angels and from heaven untiringly sent them bread already prepared, containing every delight, satisfying every taste. And remember what Wisdom says – *as it came from heaven, from God,* and demonstrated His sweetness towards His children, *it tasted as each eater wished and produced the effects that each person wanted,* and was thus useful to babies, whose stomachs are still delicate, and to adults enjoying good appetite and healthy digestions, and to delicate girls and to decrepit old people. *And, to testify that it was not the work of man, it overturned the laws of elements, and the mysterious bread, which at sunrise melted like frost, endured fire.* Or rather – it is still Wisdom speaking – fire forgot its own nature out of respect for the work of God, its Creator, and for the needs of the just people of God, so that, while it burns to torture, in this case it became mild to assist those who confided in God. Thus by transforming itself in many ways, it served the grace of the Lord, nourishing everyone, according to the will of those who

prayed the Eternal Father, so that the beloved children might learn that it is not the reproduction of fruit which nourishes men, but *it is the word of the Lord that preserves those who believe in God*. In fact it did not consume the sweet manna, as it was able to do, not even when it flared, whereas the mild morning sunshine could melt it, so that *men should learn and remember that the gifts of God are to be sought from the very beginning of the day and of life, and that one must anticipate Light to receive them, and rise and pray the Eternal Father at daybreak*.

That is what manna taught the Hebrews. And I am reminding you because *that duty still lasts and will last forever. Seek the Lord and His celestial gifts without idling until the late hours of day or of life. Rise and praise Him before the rising sun does, and feed on His word, which consecrates, preserves and leads to True life*. It was not Moses who gave you the bread of Heaven, but it was God the Father, and now I solemnly tell you that *it is My Father Who gives you the true Bread, the new Bread, the eternal Bread, which descends from Heaven, the Bread of mercy, the Bread of Life, the Bread that gives Life to the world, the Bread that satisfies every hunger and removes all languor, the Bread that gives eternal Life and eternal joy to those who eat it.*»

«Give us some of that bread, Lord, and we shall not die.»

«You will die as every man dies, but *you will rise to eternal Life, if you feed holily on that Bread, because those who eat it, become Incorruptible*. With regard to giving it, *it will be given to those who ask My Father for it with pure hearts, upright intentions and holy charity*. That is why I taught you to say: “Give us our daily Bread.” But *those who eat it unworthily, will become swarms of infernal worms, like the baskets of manna kept contrary to instructions received. And the Bread of health and life will become conviction and death for them. Because the greatest sacrilege will be committed by those who place that Bread on a corrupt foul spiritual table and profane it by mixing it with the sink of their incurable passions. It would have been better if they had never taken it!*»

«But where is that Bread? How can one find it? What is its name?»

«*I am the Bread of Life. You will find it in Me. Its name is Jesus. He who comes to Me will never be hungry again, and he who believes in Me will never be thirsty again, because celestial rivers will flow into him quenching all material ardour*. I have already told you. And you have known Me by now. And yet you

do not believe Me. *You cannot believe that everything is in Me. And yet it is so*. All the treasures of God are in Me. And everything pertaining to the earth has been given to Me; thus the glorious Heavens and the militant earth are united in Me and even the expiating and expecting mass of those who died in the grace of God are in Me, because all power has been given to Me and is in Me. And I tell you: *everything the Father gives Me, will come to Me. And I will not reject those who come to Me, because I descended from Heaven not to do My will, but the will of Him Who sent Me*. And this is the will of My Father, of the Father Who sent Me: *that I may lose not even one of those He gave Me, but I may raise them from death on the last day*. Now the will of the Father Who sent Me is that *whoever knows the Son and believes in Him, will have eternal Life and I may raise him on the Last Day, seeing that he is nourished with faith in Me and is signed with My seal.*»

People begin to grumble both inside and outside the synagogue because of Jesus' new hardy words. And the Master, after taking breath, looks with ecstatically shining eyes towards the people who are grumbling more loudly, that is towards the groups in which there are some Judaeans. He resumes speaking.

«Why are you grumbling among yourselves? Yes, I am the Son of Mary of Nazareth, the daughter of Joachim of the house of David, a virgin consecrated in the Temple and then married to Joseph of Jacob, of the house of David. Many of you have known the just parents of Joseph, a royal carpenter, and those of Mary, the virgin heiress of the royal stock. And you thus say: “How can He say that He descended from Heaven?”, and you become doubtful.

I remind you of the Prophets who prophesied the Incarnation of the Word. And I remind you that it is a dogma, more for us Israelites than for any other people, that He, Whose name we dare not mention, could not become Flesh according to the laws of mankind, and an impoverished mankind at that. *The Most Pure Uncreated One, if He humiliated Himself by becoming Man for the sake of man, could but choose the womb of a Virgin purer than lilies to clothe His Divinity with Flesh*. The Bread that descended from Heaven in the days of Moses, was placed in the gold Ark, which supported the Mercy Seat and was Watched over by Cherubim, behind the veils of the Tabernacle. *And the Word of God was with the Bread*. And it was right that it should be so, because the deepest respect is to be paid to the gifts of God and to the tables of His most holy Word. So what will God have prepared for His own Word and for the true Bread that has come from Heaven? *A more immaculate and precious Ark than the gold one, to support the*

precious Mercy Seat of His pure will to immolate Himself, watched over by the cherubim of God, veiled by virginal purity, by perfect humility, sublime charity and all the most holy virtues.

So? Do you not understand yet that *My Paternity is in Heaven*, and that, consequently, I come from there? Yes, I descended from Heaven to fulfill the decree of My Father, *the decree of salvation of men, according to what He promised at the same moment of condemnation*, and He repeated to Patriarchs and Prophets. And that is faith. And *faith is given by God to souls of good will. No one, therefore, can come to Me, unless My Father leads him to Me, as although He sees that he is in darkness, He knows that he is craving for light.* It is written in the Prophets: "They will be all taught by God." So, that was decided. *It is God Who instructs them where to go to be taught by God. Therefore, whoever has heard God speak in the depth of his righteous soul, has learned from the Father to come to Me.*»

«And who has ever heard God or seen His Face?» ask many who begin to show signs of irritation and scandal. And they conclude: «You are either raving or You are a day-dreamer.»

«*No one has seen God except Him Who came from God: He has seen the Father. And I am He.* And now listen to the Creed of future Life, without which no one can be saved.

I solemnly tell you that *he who believes in Me has eternal Life.* I solemnly tell you that *I am the Bread of eternal Life.*

Your fathers ate manna in the desert and they died. Because manna was a holy but temporary food and gave life as was required to reach the Land Promised by God to His people. But the Manna Which I am, will have no limit of time or power. It is not only celestial, but divine and produces what is divine: the incorruptibility and immortality of what God created to His image and likeness. It will not last forty days, forty months, forty years, forty centuries. But it will last until the end of Time and will be given to all those who hunger for what is holy and pleasing to the Lord, Who will rejoice at giving Himself incommensurably to men, *for whom He became incarnate, that they may have the Life which does not die.*

I can give Myself, I can transubstantiate for the sake of men, so that the bread may become Flesh and the Flesh may become Bread, for the *spiritual hunger* of men, who without that Food would die of starvation and *spiritual diseases.* But

if one eats this Bread with justice, one will live forever. The bread which I will give is *My Body sacrificed for the Life of the world*, it is My Love spread in the houses of God, so that all loving or unhappy souls may come to the Table of the Lord, and may find solace to their need to be united to God and relief to their sorrows.»

«But how can You give us Your flesh to eat? Who do You think we are? Bloodthirsty beasts? Savages? Murderers? Blood and crime disgust us.»

«I tell you solemnly that *man is very often more cruel than beasts, that sin makes men savages, that pride makes them bloodthirsty murderers* and that blood and crime will not disgust all the people present here. And *also in future man will be the same, because Satan, sensuality and pride make him brutal.* Man therefore with greater care *must rid himself of the dreadful germs through the infusion of the Holy One.* I tell you solemnly that *if you do not eat the Flesh of the Son of man and you do not drink His Blood, you will not have Life in you.* He who eats My Flesh *worthily* and drinks My Blood, has eternal Life and I will raise him up on the Last Day. For My Flesh is real Food and My Blood is real Drink. *He who eats My Flesh and drinks My Blood lives in Me, and I live in him.* As the living Father sent Me, and I live for the Father, so *whoever eats Me will live also for Me and will go where I send him, and will do what I want, and will live austere, as a man, and as ardently as a Seraph, and will be holy, because in order to be able to feed on My Flesh and My Blood, he will abstain from sin and will live ascending and finish his ascent at the feet of the Eternal Father.*»

«He is mad! Who can live like that? In our religion only the priest is to be purified to offer the victim. He wants to make us victims of His madness. His doctrine is too painful and his language too hard! Who can listen to Him and practise what He says?» whisper the people present and many are disciples known as such.

The crowds disperse making their comments. And when the Master is alone in the synagogue with His most faithful followers, the number of disciples has diminished considerably. I cannot count them, but I would say that, more or less, they are about one hundred. So there must have been a remarkable defection also in the group of the old disciples by now at the service of God. Among those left there are the apostles, John the priest and John the scribe, Stephen, Hermas, Timoneus, Ermasteus, Agapo, Joseph, Solomon, Abel of Bethlehem of Galilee, and Abel the leper of Korazim, with his friend Samuel, Elias (the one who did

not bury his father to follow Jesus), Philip of Arbela, Aser and Ishmael of Nazareth, and some whose names I do not know. They are speaking to one another in low voices commenting on the defection of the others and the words of Jesus, Who with folded arms is leaning against a high lectern.

«Are you scandalised at what I told you? And if I told you that one day you will see the Son of man ascend to Heaven where He was before, and sit beside His Father? What have you understood, assimilated and believed so far? And how have you heard and assimilated? Only through your humanity? *It is the spirit that gives life and is important.* The flesh is of no avail. *My words are spirit and life, and they are to be heard and understood through the spirit to have life.* But there are many among you whose spirits are dead because they are without faith. *Many of you do not really believe. And they are staying with Me in vain.* They will not receive Life, but Death. Because they are staying with Me, as I said at the beginning, either out of curiosity, or for human pleasure, or worse still, for more worthless purposes. They have not been led here by My Father, as a reward to their good will, but by Satan. Nobody can really come to Me, unless it is granted to him by My Father. You may go, you who find it difficult to remain here, because you are ashamed, from a human point of view, to leave Me, but you are more ashamed to stay at the service of One Who seems “mad and hard” to you. Go. It is better for you to be far away, than be here and do harm.»

Many of the disciples withdraw, among them there is John, the scribe, Marcus, the possessed Gerasene, who was cured by Jesus and the devils possessing him were sent into pigs. The good disciples consult with one another and run after their faithless companions endeavouring to stop them.

In the synagogue there is only Jesus with the chief of the synagogue and the apostles...

Jesus turns towards the twelve apostles, who are deeply humiliated and are standing in a corner and says to them: «Do you want to go as well?» He says so without bitterness and without sadness, but very seriously.

Peter replies with sorrowful transport: «Lord, where can we go? To whom? You are our life and our love. You alone have words of eternal Life. We know that You are the Christ, the Son of God. If You wish, send us away. But we will not leave You of our own free will not even... not even if You should not love us any more...» and Peter sheds large tears silently...

Andrew, John, Alphaeus' two sons also weep openly, and the others, who are

either pale or flushed through emotion, do not weep, but are clearly suffering.

«Why should I send you away? Did I not choose you twelve?...»

Jairus has wisely withdrawn to leave Jesus free to console or reproach His apostles. Jesus, Who has noticed his silent withdrawal, sits down; He is tired, disgusted, grieved and depressed, as if the revelation He is about to make, cost Him a greater effort than He can possibly bear, and He says: «And yet, one of you is a demon.»

His words drop slowly, frighteningly, in the synagogue, where only the light of the lamps seems to be cheerful... and no one dare speak. They look at one another with fearful disgust and painful inquisitiveness and each one examines himself with even greater anguish and uncertainty...

No one moves for a while. And Jesus remains alone, on His seat, with His hands crossed on His knees and lowered face. He at last looks up and says: «Come. I am not a leper! Or do you think I am?...»

John then rushes forward and throwing his arms round Jesus, neck he says: «I will be with You, then, my only love, in Your leprosy. I will be with You in Your conviction, in Your death, if that is what You think is awaiting You...»; and Peter creeps at His feet, takes them in his hands and laying them on his shoulders he says sobbing: «Press them here, tread on me! But do not make me think that You do not trust Your Simon.»

When the others see that Jesus is caressing the first two, they come forward and kiss Jesus' clothes, His hands and hair... Only the Iscariot dares to kiss Him on His cheek.

Jesus springs to His feet and His movement is so sudden that He seems to be repelling him rudely, and He says: «Let us go home. Tomorrow night we will leave for Hippo by boat.»

354. Nicolaus of Antioch. Second Announcement of the Passion.

9th December 1945.

Jesus is all alone on the terrace of Thomas' house in Capernaum. The town is

quiet on the Sabbath and its population is already greatly reduced, as the most zealous in practising their religion have already left for Jerusalem, as well as those who go there with their families and have children who cannot march long distances and thus compel adults to make frequent stops and short journeys. One thus misses the bright note of cheerful children, even more so on a rather cloudy day. Jesus is pensive. He is sitting on a low bench in a corner near the parapet, with His back to the staircase, almost hidden by the parapet; He is resting one elbow on His knee and reclines His head on His hand with a tired almost painful gesture.

He is interrupted in His meditation by the arrival of a little boy who wants to say goodbye to Him before leaving for Jerusalem. «Jesus! Jesus!» he calls at each step, as he cannot see Jesus because the low wall conceals Him from the sight of whoever is below. And Jesus is so engrossed in thought that He does not hear the light voice or the step of the child, which is as light as a dove's... so that when the boy arrives on the terrace, He is still in the same painful position. And the little boy is frightened. He stops on the threshold, puts a finger between his lips and thinks... he then makes up his mind and moves slowly forward... he is now almost behind Jesus' back... he bends to see what He is doing... and says: «No, lovely Jesus! Don't weep! Why? Because of those bad ugly men of yesterday? My father was saying to Jairus that they are not worthy of You. But You must not weep. I love You. And my little sister, and James and Toby, and Johanna, and Mary and Micah and all the children in Capernaum, they all love You. Don't weep any more...» and he clasps Jesus' neck caressing Him and concludes: «Otherwise I will weep, too and I will weep during all the journey...»

«No, David, I am not weeping any more. You have consoled Me. Are you alone? When are you leaving?»

«After sunset. We are going by boat as far as Tiberias. Come with us. My father loves You, You know?»

«Yes, I know, My dear. But I must go to other children... Thank you for coming to say goodbye to Me. I bless you, little David. Let us kiss each other goodbye and then you will go back to your mother. Does she know that you are here?...»

«No, she doesn't. I ran away because I did not see You with Your disciples and I thought that You might be weeping.»

«I am not weeping any more, as you can see. Go back to your mother, who perhaps is looking for you and is worried. Goodbye. Watch the donkeys of the

caravans. See? They stop everywhere.»

«Are You really not weeping any more?»

«No. I am no longer grieved. You have comforted Me. Thank you, My child.»

The boy runs down the steps while Jesus watches him. He then shakes His head and goes back to His place in the same sorrowful meditation as before.

Some time goes by. The setting sun appears now and again when the cloudy sky clears.

A heavy step is heard coming up the staircase. Jesus looks up. He sees Jairus going towards Him. He greets him. Jairus replies respectfully.

«How come you are here, Jairus?»

«Lord! Perhaps I have done the wrong thing. But as You see the, hearts of men You know that there was no ill-will in mine. I did not invite You to speak in the synagogue today. But I suffered for You so much yesterday, and I saw You suffer so much... that I did not dare. I spoke to Your disciples. They said to me: "He wishes to be alone"... But a little while ago Philip, David's father, came to me saying that his son had seen You weep. He said that You thanked him for coming to see You. So I came, too. Master, the people who are still in Capernaum, are about to meet in the synagogue. And my synagogue is Yours, Lord.»

«Thank you, Jairus. Other people will speak there today. I will come as a simple believer...»

«And You would not be obliged to come. The world is Your synagogue. Are You not really coming, Master?»

«No, Jairus. I am staying here with My spirit before the Father Who understands Me and finds no fault in Me.» Jesus' sad eyes shine with tears.

«Neither do I find fault in You... Goodbye, Lord.»

«Goodbye, Jairus.» And Jesus sits down once again, meditating.

Jairus' daughter, in a white dress, goes upstairs as lightly as a dove. She looks round... She then calls in a low voice: «My Saviour!»

Jesus looks round, sees her, smiles and says: «Come near Me.»

«Yes, my Lord. But I would like to take You to the others. Why is the synagogue to be silent today?»

«There is your father and many others to fill it with words.»

«But they are words... Yours is the Word. Oh! My Lord! Through Your word You gave me back to my mother and father, and I was dead. But look at those who are now going towards the synagogue! Many of them are more dead than I was. Come and give them Life.»

«My dear daughter, you deserved it; they... No word can give life to those who choose death for themselves.»

«Yes, my Lord. But come just the same. There are also some who live more intensely when they hear You... Come. Give me Your hand and let us go. I am the witness of Your power and I am ready to bear witness also before Your enemies, even at the cost of being deprived of this second life, which in any case is no longer mine. You gave it to me, my dear Master, out of pity for a mother and a father. But I...

» the girl, a beautiful girl, almost a young woman, with large bright eyes and a pure intelligent face, stops choked by tears, which from her long eyelashes stream down her cheeks.

«Why are you weeping, now?» asks Jesus laying His hand on her hair.

«Because... I was told that You say that You will die...»

«Everybody must die, my girl.»

«But not as You say!... I... oh! now I would not have liked to be brought back to life, in order not to see that, not to be there when... that horrible thing will happen...»

«In that case, you would not have been here either to comfort Me as you are doing now. Do you not know that a word, even one word only, of a pure soul who loves Me, takes all grief away from Me?»

«Does it? Oh! Then You must no longer be grieved because I love you more than I love my father, my mother and my own life!»

«It is so.»

«Then come. Don't be alone. Speak for me, for Jairus, for my mother, for little

David, for those who love You. We are many, and we will be more. But do not be alone. It makes You sad» and through motherly instinct, like every honest woman, she ends saying: «No one will hurt You if I am near You. In any case, I will defend You.»

Jesus stands up and pleases her. With His hand in hers, they cross the street and enter the synagogue by a side door.

Jairus, who is reading a roll in a loud voice, stops reading and bowing lowly says: «Master, please speak to those whose hearts are righteous. Prepare us for Passover with Your holy word.»

«You are reading the Book of Kings, are you not?»

«Yes, Master. I was endeavouring to make them consider that those who part from the true God become idolaters of golden calves.»

«You are quite right. Does anybody wish to speak?»

The crowd begins to whisper. Some want Jesus to speak, some shout: «We are in a hurry. Let us say the prayers and dismiss the congregation. We are going to Jerusalem in any case and we will hear the rabbis there.» Those who shout thus are the deserters who have been held up in Capernaum because of the Sabbath.

Jesus looks at them with deep sadness and says: «You are in a hurry. That is true. God also is in a hurry to judge you. You may go.» Then addressing the people who are reproaching them He says: «Do not rebuke them. Each tree bears its own fruit.»

«Master! Repeat the gesture of Nehemia! Since You are the High Priest, speak against them!» shouts Jairus indignantly and the apostles, the faithful disciples and the people of Capernaum join in with him.

Jesus stretches out His arms crosswise; He is very pale and His countenance is most sorrowful, although very kind while He cries: «Remember Me, My God! Remember Me propitiously! And remember them propitiously, too! I forgive them!»

The synagogue is soon empty, only those who are faithful to Jesus have remained... There is a stranger in a corner. A strong man whom no one notices and to whom no one speaks. On the other hand he does not speak to anybody. He stares at Jesus, so much so that the Master turns His eyes towards him and asks Jairus who he is.

«I do not know. He must be a passer-by.»

Jesus asks him: «Who are you?»

«Nicolaus, a proselyte from Antioch. I am going to Jerusalem for Passover.»

«Whom are you looking for?»

«For You, Lord, Jesus of Nazareth. I wish to speak to You.»

«Come, then.» And when he comes near, Jesus goes out with him into the kitchen garden behind the synagogue, to listen to him.

«I spoke in Antioch with a disciple of Yours, whose name is Felix. I have longed to meet You. He told me that you are often in Capernaum and that Your Mother lives in Nazareth. And that You go to Gethsemane or to Bethany. The Eternal Father has granted me to find You in the first place. I was here yesterday... And I was near You this morning, while You were weeping and praying near the fountain... I love You, Lord, because You are holy and meek. I believe in You. Your actions and Your words had already conquered me. But Your mercy of a little while ago, on the culprits, has finally convinced me. Lord, accept me in place of those who leave You! I will come to You with everything I have: my life, my wealth, everything.» He has knelt down while saying the last words.

Jesus gazes at him... then He says: «Come. As from today you belong to the Master. Let us go to your companions.»

They go back into the synagogue where the disciples and apostles are discussing animatedly with Jairus.

«Here is a new disciple. The Father has comforted Me. Love him as your brother. Let us go and share with him our bread and salt. Then, during the night, you will leave for Jerusalem with him and we will go to Hippo by boat... And do not tell anybody which way I am going so that I shall not be held up.»

In the meantime the Sabbath is over and those who want to shun Jesus have gathered on the beach haggling over the price of boats to Tiberias. And they quarrel with Zebedee who does not want to hire out his boat, which is ready near Peter's to depart during the night with Jesus and the Twelve.

«I will go and help him!» says Peter who is annoyed.

To avoid too big a clash, Jesus holds him back saying: «We will all go, not just

yourself.»

And they go... And they experience a bitter disappointment seeing the fugitives go away without even a nod, avoiding all contact in order to go away from Jesus... and they hear some unpleasant epithets also and acrid advice to the faithful disciples...

Jesus turns round to go back home after the hostile crowd has left, and He says to the new disciple: «Have you heard them? That is what you are to expect if you come with Me.»

«I know. That is why I am staying. I saw You one glorious day when the crowds cheered You and hailed You “king”. I shrugged my shoulders saying: “Another poor day-dreamer! Another plague for Israel!”, and I did not follow You because You looked like a king and I forgot all about You. I will now follow You because I see the promised Messiah in Your words and kindness.»

«You are really more just than many others. But once again I warn you. He who hopes that I am an earthly king, should go away. He who feels that he will be ashamed of Me before the world accusing Me, should go away. He who will be scandalised seeing Me treated as an evil-doer should go away. I am telling you so that you may do so before being compromised in the eyes of the world. Imitate those who are escaping in those boats, *if you feel that you cannot share My lot in disgrace, to be able to share it later in glory*. Because this is what is about to happen: the Son of man is about to be accused and put into the hands of men, who will kill Him as a criminal and will believe that they defeated Him. But they will have accomplished their crime in vain. Because after three days I will rise from the dead and triumph. Blessed are those who will be able to stay with Me till the end!»

They have now reached the house and Jesus entrusts the newcomer to the disciples, and goes upstairs where He was before. He goes into the upper room and sits down meditating.

Shortly afterwards the Iscariot goes upstairs with Peter. «Master, Judas has made me ponder on certain matters that I think are right.»

«Tell Me.»

«You have accepted this Nicolaus, a proselyte, whose past is unknown to us. We have already had so much trouble... and we are still experiencing it. And now? What do we know about him? Can we trust him? Judas quite rightly says that he

may be a spy sent by our enemies.»

«Of course! A traitor! Why does he not want to tell us where he comes from and who sent him? I have asked him, but he says only: “I am Nicolaus from Antioch, a proselyte.” I am very suspicious.»

«I would remind you that he came because he saw that I was betrayed.»

«It may be a lie! It may be treachery!»

«He who sees falsehood and treachery everywhere, is a soul capable of such things, because he measures himself on his own model» replies Jesus seriously.

«Lord, You are offending me!» shouts Judas indignantly.

«Leave Me, then, and go with those who abandoned Me.»

Judas goes out slamming the door very rudely.

«But, Lord, Judas is not entirely wrong... In any case, I would not like that man... to mention John. It must be Felix, the man of Endor, who sent him to You...»

«It is certainly so. But John of Endor is a wise man and he resumed his old name. Do not worry, Simon. A man who becomes a disciple because he realises that My human cause is lost, can but be a righteous spirit. Quite different from him who just went out and who came to Me because he was hoping to become the prince of a powerful king... and he cannot convince himself that I am King only for the spirit...»

«Do You suspect him, Lord?»

«I suspect no one. But I solemnly tell you that the apostle Judas of Simon, an Israelite and Judaeon, will never go as far as Nicolaus, a disciple and proselyte.»

«Lord, I would like to ask Nicolaus after... John.»

«No, do not. John has not entrusted him with any task, because he is wise. Do not be the unwise one.»

«No, Lord, I was only asking You...»

«Let us go downstairs and hasten the supper. At dead of night we will leave... Simon... do you love Me?»

«Oh! Master! What are You asking?»

«Simon, My heart is darker than the lake in a stormy night and as agitated as it...»

«Oh! Master of mine!... What shall I tell You, if I am more sullen and agitated than You are? I can only say: “Here is Your Simon. And if my heart can comfort You, take it.” It is the only thing I have, but it is sincere.»

For a moment Jesus rests His head on Peter's wide strong chest and then stands up and goes downstairs with him.

355. Going towards Gadara.

10th December 1945.

Jesus is already beyond the Jordan. And from what I understand, the town I can see on top of a green hill, is Gadara and it is the first town they reach after landing on the south-east coast of the lake of Galilee. In fact that is where they landed, as they did not disembark at Hippo, where they were preceded by the boats carrying the people hostile to Jesus. I think that they set ashore opposite Tarichea, where the Jordan flows out of the lake.

«You know the shortest road to Gadara, do you not? Do you remember it?» asks Jesus.

«Of course I do! When we are at the hot springs near the river Yarmuk, all we have to do is to follow the road» replies Peter.

«And where will you find the springs?» asks Thomas.

«Oh! Your nose will tell you where they are. They smell a mile away!» exclaims Peter turning up his nose in disgust.

«I did not know that you were troubled with pains...» remarks Judas Iscariot.

«Pains? Me? Never!»

«Hey! if you are so familiar with the hot springs at the Yarmuk, you must have been there.»

«I never needed hot springs to be fit! The poison in my bones always came out

with the perspiration of my honest work... in any case, as I worked more than I enjoyed myself, there was always very little poison in me...»

«That one is for me, isn't it? I am guilty of everything...» says Judas angrily.

«Who bit you? You asked me a question and I replied to you, as I would have replied to the Master or to a companion. And I think that none of them, not even Matthew... who was a pleasure-seeking person, would have taken it amiss.»

«Well, I do!»

«I did not know that you are so touchy. But I apologise for the assumed insinuation. For the Master's sake, you know. He is so stressed by strangers that there is no need for us to vex Him further. Instead of running after your own touchiness, look at Him, do you will realise how much He needs peace and love.»

Jesus does not speak. He simply looks at Peter and smiles gratefully.

Judas does not reply to Peter's fair remark. He is taciturn and irritated. He wants to appear kind, but the anger, bad mood, and disappointment of his heart are clearly revealed by his eyes, voice and countenance, and even by his overbearing gait, as he stamps the ground angrily giving vent to what boils within him.

But he strives to look calm and be kind, he does not succeed, but he tries... He asks Peter: «Well, then, how do you know these places? Perhaps you have been here for your wife?»

«No, we passed here when in the month of Ethanim we came to Hauran with the Master. I took His Mother and the women disciples to Chuza's estate. Coming via Bozrah, we passed by here» replies Peter sincerely and wisely.

«Were you alone?» asks Judas ironically.

«Why? Do you think that I by myself am not as good as several people when it is the case of showing how clever you are, and there is an important task to be done and one does it with all good will?»

«Oh! How proud you are! I would have loved to see you!»

«You would have seen a grave man accompanying holy women.»

«But were you really alone?» asks Judas with the true attitude of an inquisitor.

«I was with the Lord's brothers.»

«Ah! You are beginning to make admissions!»

«And you are beginning to get on my nerves! Can you tell me what is the matter with you?»

«That's true. It is a shame» says Thomas.

«It's time you stopped it» corroborates James of Zebedee.

«It is not right for you to sneer at Simon» states Bartholomew reproachingly.

«You ought to remember that he is the Head of us all» concludes the Zealot.

Jesus is silent.

«Oh! I am not sneering at anybody, and nothing is the matter with me. I just like to tease him a little...»

«That is not true! You are a liar! You ask sly questions because you want to arrive at some conclusion. A sly man thinks that everybody is sly. We have no secrets. We were all there, and we all did the same thing: what the Master told us. And there is nothing else. Is that clear?» shouts the other Judas who is really angry.

«Be quiet. You are like quarrelsome women. You are all wrong. And I am ashamed of you» says Jesus severely.

There is total silence while they go towards the town on the hill. Thomas breaks the silence exclaiming: «What a dreadful smell!»

«It's the springs. That is the Yarmuk and those buildings are the Roman Thermae. Beyond them there is a beautiful paved road that takes one to Gadara. Romans like to travel in comfort. Gadara is beautiful!» says Peter.

«It is even more beautiful because we will not find certain... beings here, at least not many of them» grumbles Matthew between his teeth.

They cross the bridge over the river in the pungent smell of sulphur water. They pass near the Thermae, among Roman vehicles, and they take a beautiful road, paved with large slabs, which takes to the town on the top of the hill, a beautiful town enclosed by walls.

John approaches the Master and asks: «Is it true that in old days a damned soul was hurled down into the bowels of the earth where those waters are? My mother used to tell us that when we were little children to make us understand that one must not commit sin, otherwise hell opens under the feet of a soul

cursed by God and swallows the sinner. And then in memory and as a warning, cracks remain through which smell, heat and water of hell come up. I would be afraid to bathe in there...»

«Afraid of what, boy? It would not infect you. It is easier to be infected by those men who have hell within themselves and exhale the stench and poison of hell. But only those are contaminated who are inclined to become so by themselves.»

«Could I be contaminated?»

«No. Not even if you were among a crowd of demons.»

«Why not? What has he got which is different from everybody else?» asks Judas of Kerioth at once.

«He is pure in every way and thus he can see God» replies Jesus and Judas laughs maliciously.

John asks once again: «So those springs are not mouths of hell?»

«No. On the contrary they are good things made by God for His children. Hell is not enclosed in the earth. It is on the earth, John, in the hearts of men. And it expands further there.»

«But does Hell really exist?» asks the Iscariot.

«What are you saying?» ask his companions who are thoroughly scandalised.

«I am asking: does it really exist? I don't believe it does, and I am not the only one.»

«Heathen!» they shout with horror.

«No. Israelite. Many of us in Israel do not believe such nonsense.»

«Well, how can you believe in Paradise?», «And in God's justice?», «Where do you put sinners?», «What about Satan?» many of the apostles object shouting.

«I say what I think. A short while ago I was blamed for being a liar. I am proving that I am sincere, even if what I say scandalises you and makes me hateful in your eyes. In any case I am not the only one in Israel, since Israel has improved in knowledge through contacts with Hellenists and Romans, who are of such opinion. And the Master, the only one whose opinion I respect, cannot reproach me or Israel, as He protects Romans and Greeks and is openly their friend... I base myself on the following philosophical concept. If everything is

controlled by God, everything we do depends on His will, and He must reward us all in the same way, because we are only automata moved by Him. We are beings devoid of will. The Master Himself says so: "The Will of the Most High. The Will of the Father." That is the only Will. And it is so infinite that it crushes and destroys the limited will of creatures. Consequently, both the Good and the Evil, which we appear to do, is done by God, Who imposes it on us. Thus He will not punish us for evil deeds and His justice will be administered that way, because our sins are not voluntary but they are imposed by Him Who wants us to commit them, so that both good and evil may be on the earth. He who is bad is the means of expiation for those who are not so bad. And he suffers within himself as he cannot be considered good, and thus expiates his part of sin. Jesus said so. Hell is on the earth and in the hearts of men. I do not perceive Satan. He does not exist. Once I believed he existed. But for some time I have convinced myself that it is a lot of nonsense. And one attains peace through such belief.»

Judas expounds such... theory with so much ostentation that the others stand breathless with astonishment... Jesus is silent. And Judas teases Him: «Am I not right, Master?»

«No.» His «no» is so sharp that it sounds like an explosion.

«And yet I... I do not perceive Satan, neither do I admit free will or Evil. And all the Sadducees are of my opinion as well as many other people in Israel. No, Satan does not exist.»

Jesus looks at him. His glance is so complex that it cannot be analysed. It is the glance of a Judge, of a Doctor, of a grieved astonished man... There is everything in it...

Judas, who is already launched out, concludes: «Perhaps it is because I am better and more perfect than the others, that I have overcome the terror of men for Satan.»

And Jesus is silent. But Judas teases Him: «Speak! Why am I not terrified?» Jesus keeps silent. «Are You not replying, Master? Why? Are You afraid?»

«No. I am Charity. And Charity withholds its opinion until it is compelled to give it... Leave Me and go away» He says at last, because Judas tries to embrace Him, and when He is held by force in the arms of the blasphemer, He whispers to him: «You disgust Me! You do not see or perceive Satan, because he is all one with you. Go away, you demon!»

Judas kisses Him impudently and laughs, as if the Master had praised him secretly. He goes back to the others who are so aghast that they have stopped and he says to them: «See? I know how to open the Master's heart. And I make Him happy by showing Him my confidence and I learn. You, instead!... You never dare speak to Him. Because you are proud. Oh! I will know more about Him than anybody else. And I will be able to speak...»

They reach the gates of the town. They all go in together, because Jesus has waited for them. But while going through the entrance hall, Jesus commands: «My brothers and Simon, go ahead and gather the people.»

«Why not I, Master? Are You not giving me any more missions to fulfill? Are they no longer necessary now? You gave me two, one after the other, and they lasted for months...»

«And you complained and said that I wanted to keep you away. Are you now complaining because I want to keep you with Me?»

Judas does not know what to reply and is silent. He goes ahead with Thomas, the Zealot, James of Zebedee and Andrew. Jesus stops to let Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew and John pass, as if He wished to be left alone. They do not interfere.

But the loving heart of John, whose eyes have often been shining with tears during the blasphemous dispute of Judas, compels the apostle to turn round shortly afterwards, just in time to see Jesus press His forehead with His hands, with a gesture of sorrow, and bend forward like one in great pain. Jesus does so thinking He was unobserved in the little lonely street, which is also dark owing to the many arches across it. Fair-headed John leaves his companions and goes back to his Master: «What is the matter, my Lord? Are you Suffering once again as when we found You at Achzib? Oh! My Lord!»

«It is nothing, John! Help Me with your love. And do not say anything to the others. Pray for Judas.»

«Yes, Master. He is very unhappy, is he not? He is in darkness, and does not know. He thinks that he has attained peace... Is it peace?»

«He is very unhappy» says Jesus dejectedly.

«Don't be so sad, Master. Think of how many sinners have become good, although they were hardened in sin. Judas will do the same. Oh! You will

certainly save him! I will spend the night praying for that. I will tell the Father to make me capable only of loving, I do not want anything else. I was hoping to give my life for You or to make Your power shine through my work. Now no longer so. I renounce everything, I choose the most humble and common life and I will ask the Father to give what is mine to Judas... to make him happy... so that he may turn to holiness... Lord... I should tell You something... I think I know why Judas is like that.»

«Come tonight. We will pray together and speak.»

«And will the Father listen to me? Will He accept my sacrifice?»

«The Father will bless you. But you will suffer...»

«Oh! No! It is enough for me to see that You are happy... and that Judas... and that Judas...»

«Yes, John. Look, they are calling us. Let us run.»

The little street becomes a beautiful one, adorned with porches and fountains. And it is embellished with beautiful squares: each one being more beautiful than the others. It crosses another main street, which is just as beautiful, and at the end of it there is an amphitheatre. Several sick people have already gathered in a corner of the porches waiting for the Saviour.

Peter comes towards Jesus: «They have retained faith in what we told them about You in the month of Ethanim. They came at once.»

«And I will reward their faith at once. Let us go.»

And while the sun is setting and tingeing the marble buildings with red, He goes to heal those who are waiting for Him with faith.

356. The Night at Gadara and the Sermon on Divorce.

11th December 1945.

The magnificent stars of a clear night in the month of March are shining in the eastern sky and they are so large and bright that the vault of heaven seems to have stooped down like a canopy over the terrace of the house that welcomed

Jesus. It is a very tall house, situated in one of the highest parts of the town, so that the infinite horizon spreads out before those who look in every direction. And if the earth disappears in the darkness of the night, which is not brightened by moonlight, as the moon is waning, the sky is glittering with countless stars. It is really the victory of the firmament, which triumphantly displays its garden beds of stars, its Galatea grasslands, its planetary giants and forests of constellations in opposition to the fleeting vegetation of the earth, which, even when it is age old, is still one hour old, as compared with those that exist since God made the firmament. And when one is lost looking up there, and one's eyes roam along the wonderful avenues, where the trees are stars, one seems to hear the voices and songs of those splendid forests, of that huge organ of the most sublime cathedral, in which I like to imagine that the winds of racing stars are bellows and registers and the stars launched in their trajectories are voices. And one seems to perceive all that, particularly because the silence of the night, while Gadara is asleep, is total. No fountain whispers, no bird sings. The world is asleep, as well as all creatures. Men, who are less innocent than other creatures, are sleeping more or less peacefully in their dark homes.

But a tall dark shadow, which is just visible because of the contrast of the white face and hands against its dark garment, comes out of the door of the room that opens onto the lower terrace, there is in fact another higher one on the upper room, and is followed by another lower shadow. They are walking on tiptoe to avoid awaking those who are perhaps sleeping in the room underneath and they climb on tiptoe the outside little staircase, which takes to the top terrace. They then take each other's hand and they go and sit down on the bench that lies against the high parapet surrounding the terrace. The low bench and the high parapet conceal everything from their eyes. Even if it were bright moonlight illuminating the world, they would see nothing. Because the town is completely concealed and also the dark shadows of nearby mountains are hidden in the darkness of the night. Only the sky is displayed to them with its springtime constellations and the magnificent stars of Orion: of Rigel and Betelgeuse, of Aldebaran, of Perseus, Andromeda and Cassiopeia and the Pleiades united like sisters. And Sapphirine Venus covered with diamonds, and Mars of pale ruby, and the topaz of Jupiter are the kings of the starry population and they palpitate as if they wished to greet the Lord, hastening their palpitations of light for the Light of the world.

Jesus raises His head to look at them and rests it against the high wall, and John imitates Him getting lost looking up there where the world can be ignored...

Then Jesus says: «And now that this contemplation has cleansed us, let us pray.» He stands up and John does likewise. A long, silent, pressing prayer, said with all their souls, their arms stretched out crosswise, with their faces raised towards the east, where the first pale hint of moonlight appears. And then the «Our Father» said together, slowly, not once but three times, with increasing insistence in asking, as is clearly expressed by their voices. And their entreaty is so ardent that it separates their souls from their bodies, launching them along the ways of the Infinite.

Then there is silence. They sit down where they were before, while the moon whitens the sleeping earth more and more.

Jesus lays His arm on John's shoulder and draws him towards Himself saying: «So tell Me what you feel you must tell Me. What has My John seen, with the assistance of spiritual light, in the gloomy soul of his companion?»

«Master... I regret having said that to You. I will commit two sins...»

«Why?»

«Because I will grieve You revealing what You do not know, and... because... Master, is it a sin to speak of the evil we see in other people? It is, isn't it? So, how can I speak about it, offending against charity!...» John is depressed.

Jesus enlightens his soul: «Listen, John. According to you, who is worth more, the Master or a fellow-disciple?»

«The Master, Lord. You are worth the most.»

«And what am I according to you?»

«The Beginning and the End. You are Everything.»

«Since I am Everything, do you think that I know everything?»

«Yes, my Lord. That is why there is a great contrast in me. Because I think that You know and suffer. And because I remember that one day You told me that at times You are the Man, only the Man, and thus the Father lets You know what it is to be a man, who must behave according to reason. And I think also that God, out of pity for You, may conceal this unpleasant truth from You...»

«Cling to that idea, John, and speak confidently. It is not a sin to confide what you know to Him Who is “Everything” for you. Because He Who is “Everything” will not be scandalised, will not grumble or lack charity, not even

by thought, towards the unhappy fellow. It would be a sin if you said what you know to anyone who is not capable of being full of love, to your companions for instance, who would backbite and assail the culprit mercilessly, injuring him and themselves. It is therefore necessary to be merciful, the more merciful, the poorer the soul is in front of us, affected by many diseases. A doctor, a compassionate nurse, a mother are not much upset if a person is not seriously ill and they do not fight hard to cure him. But if a son, or a man, is seriously ill, and his life is in danger, either because of intervening gangrene or paralysis, how they strive to cure him overcoming repugnance and fatigue. Is it not so?»

«Yes, it is, Master» replies John who has taken his habitual posture with his arm round the Master's neck and his head reclined on His shoulder.

«Well, *not everybody knows how to be merciful to diseased souls.* Consequently one must be careful in revealing their trouble, so that the world may not shun them and hurt them through contempt. *A sick man who realises that he is being derided, becomes gloomy and gets worse.* If instead he is nursed with cheerful hope, he may recover because the hopeful good humour of those nursing him inspirits him and stimulates the effect of medicines. But you know that I am Mercy and I will not humble Judas. So you may speak without scruple. You are not a spy. You are a son who with loving anxiety confides to his father the evil discovered in a brother so that the father may cure him. Come on...»

John heaves a long sigh, then lowers his head further, letting it slide on to Jesus' chest, and says: «How grievous it is to speak of putrid things!... Lord... Judas is lewd... and tempts me to commit obscene things. I do not mind if he derides me. But it grieves me that he should come to You, filthy with his love affairs. Since he came, he has tempted me several times. When we happen to be alone – and he takes advantage of every opportunity – he does nothing but speak of women... and I am as disgusted with it as if I were immersed in some fetid matter that threatened to enter my mouth...»

«Are you deeply upset by that?»

«What? Upset? My soul shudders. Reason cries against such temptations... I do not want to be corrupted...»

«How does your body react?»

«It shrivels with disgust.»

«Nothing else?»

«No, Master, and I weep because I think that Judas could not cause a graver offence to a man who has consecrated his life to God. Tell me: will that be detrimental to my offering?»

«No. Not more than a handful of mud thrown against a diamond plaque. It will not affect or penetrate the plaque. A cup of clean water poured over it is enough to clean it. And it becomes more beautiful than before.»

«Cleanse me, then.»

«Your charity and your angel cleanse you. There is nothing left on you. You are a clean altar on which God descends. What else does Judas do?»

«Lord, he... Oh! Lord!» John's head slides lower.

«What?»

«He... It is not true that the money he gives You for the poor belongs to him. It is the money of the poor that he steals, to be praised for being generous, which is not true. He was wild because when You came back from mount Tabor, You took all the money away from him. And he said to me: “There are spies among us.” I replied: “Spies of what? Have you stolen, perhaps?” “No” he replied to me, “but I am far-sighted and I have two purses. Someone told the Master and He ordered me to hand everything over, and He was so authoritative that I was compelled to do so.” But it is not true, Lord, that he does so because he is provident. He does that to have money for himself. I could bear witness to that and I am almost certain that I would be telling the truth.»

«Almost certain! That uncertainty is indeed a slight fault. You cannot accuse him of being a thief, if you are not absolutely certain. The actions of men at times appear to be faulty, whereas they are good.»

«That is true, Master. I will not accuse him any more, not even in my own mind. But it is true that he has two purses, and that the one he says belongs to him and he gives to You, is instead Yours and he does so to be praised. I would not do that, because I feel that it is not right.»

«You are right. What else have you to tell Me?»

John raises his frightened face, opens his mouth to speak, then closes it and falls on his knees hiding his face in the tunic of Jesus, Who lays a hand on his head.

«So, speak up! You may have misjudged things. I will help you to consider

them properly. You must also tell Me what you think of the probable causes of Judas' sinning.»

«Lord, Judas feels that he does not have the strength he would like to have to work miracles... You are aware that it has always been his ambition... Do You remember Endor? Instead... he is the one who works fewer miracles. Since he came back, he has not been able to do anything... and during the night he moans in his dreams, as if they were nightmares and... Master!»

«Come on. Tell Me, everything.»

«And he curses... and practises witchcraft. This is not a lie and there is no doubt about it. I saw him myself. He chooses me as his companion, because I sleep soundly. Nay, because I used to sleep soundly. Now, I must admit it, I watch him and my sleep is not so sound, because I hear him as soon as he moves... Perhaps I did the wrong thing. But I pretended to be asleep to see what he was doing. And twice I have heard and seen him do horrible things. I am not an expert in sorcery, but that is what it is.»

«Does he do that by himself?»

«Sometimes he does, sometimes he does not. I followed him at Tiberias. He went into a house. I inquired later who lives there. It is a man who practises sorcery with other people. And when Judas came out, almost at daybreak, I gathered from the words they spoke that they are familiar with one another and they are many... and not all strangers. He asks the demon to give him the Power that You do not give him. That is why I renounce my part so that the Father may give it to him and he may sin no more.»

«You ought to give him your soul. But neither the Father nor I would allow that...»

There is a long silence. Then Jesus says with a tired voice: «Let us go, John. Let us go downstairs. We will rest until dawn.»

«You look more depressed than before, Lord! I should not have told You!»

«No. I already knew. But you have taken a load off your chest... and that is what matters.»

«Lord, must I avoid him?»

«No. Do not be afraid. Satan can do no harm to people like John. He terrorises

them, but he cannot take away the grace that God continuously grants them. Let us go. I will speak in the morning and then we will go to Pella. We must make haste, because the river is already swollen with the thawing snow and the rain of the past days. It will soon be in spate, particularly because a haloed moon forebodes heavy rain...»

They go downstairs and disappear in the room underneath the terrace.

It is morning. A morning in the month of March, when the sky clears and becomes overcast alternately. But clouds overwhelm clearings, trying to take possession of the sky. The breaths of warm air make the air heavy with a veil of dust that is probably blown from the tableland.

«If the wind does not change, there is going to be rain» states Peter coming out of the house with the others.

Jesus comes out last; He says goodbye to the women of the house, while the landlord joins Him. They go towards a square.

After a few steps, they are stopped by a Roman non-commissioned officer who is with other soldiers. «Are You Jesus of Nazareth?»

«Yes, I am.»

«What are You doing?»

«I am going to speak to the crowds.»

«Where?»

«In the square.»

«A seditious speech?»

«No. Precepts of virtue.»

«Be careful! Don't tell lies! Rome has had enough of false gods.»

«If you come, too, you will see that I am not telling lies.»

The man who gave Jesus hospitality feels that he must put in a word: «Since when is a rabbi asked so many questions?»

«He has been denounced as agitator.»

«Agitator, Him? You are making a blunder, Marius Severus. He is the meekest man on the earth. I can assure you.»

The officer shrugs his shoulders and replies: «So much the better for Him. But that is the denunciation that the centurion received. He may go. He has been warned.» And he turns round and goes away with his subordinates.

«Who has done that? I don't understand!» many of the people present say.

Jesus replies: «Never mind. It does not matter. Let us go while there are many people in the square. Later we shall go away from here, too.»

The square looks like a business place. It is not a market, but not much different from a market, because there are warehouses around it, with all kinds of goods stored in them. And they are crowded with people. So there are many people also in the square and as some of them point out Jesus, a crowd soon gathers round the «Nazarene». In the crowd there are all kinds of people and of every country. Some are there out of veneration, some out of curiosity.

Jesus makes a gesture that He is about to speak. «Let us listen to Him!» says a Roman coming out of a warehouse.

«Shall we not be listening to a lamentation?» replies his companion.

«Don't you believe that, Constant. He is not so boring as our usual orators.»

«Peace to those listening to Me! It is written in Ezra, in Ezra's prayer: "What shall we say now, my God, after what happened? Because, if we have deserted Your commandments, which You ordained through Your servants..."»

«Stop, You who are speaking. We will give You the subject» shout a handful of Pharisees who elbow their way through the crowd. The escort appears almost immediately and stops at the nearest corner. The Pharisees are now before Jesus. «Are You the Galilean? Are You Jesus of Nazareth?»

«I am!»

«Praised be the Lord that we have found You!» Their ugly faces are so rancorous that they do not show much joy for the meeting...

The oldest one speaks: «We have been following You for several days, but You had always left when we arrived.»

«Why are you following Me?»

«Because You are the Master and we want to be instructed by You with regard to a dark passage of the Law.»

«There are no dark passages in the Law of God.»

«Not in the Law. But, eh! eh!... "superimpositions", as You say, eh! eh!, have been made to the Law and have caused obscurity.»

«A dim light, at most. And it is enough to turn one's mind to God to dispel it.»

«Not everybody can do that. We, for instance, are left in the dim light. You are the Rabbi, eh! eh! So help us.»

«What is it that you want to know?»

«We want to know whether it is lawful for a man to repudiate his wife for any reason whatsoever. It is something that happens frequently and every time it causes a stir wherever it happens. People apply to us to know whether it is lawful. And we reply according to each case.»

«And you approve what happened in ninety per cent of the cases. And the remaining ten per cent, which you do not approve, concerns the poor or your enemies.»

«How do You know?»

«Because that is what happens in all human things. And I would add a third group of people: those who would be more entitled to it, if divorce were lawful: that is, real pitiful cases, such as incurable leprosy, life imprisonment, or unmentionable diseases...»

«So, according to You, it is never lawful.»

«Neither according to Me, nor according to the Most High, or anyone with a righteous soul. Have you not read, that the Creator, at the beginning of times, created man and woman? And He created them male and female; and it was not necessary for Him to do so, because He could have created a different way of procreation for the king of Creation, whom He made in His image and likeness, and it would have been a good way, even if it differed from every other natural way. And He said: "For this reason man will leave his father and mother and will join himself to his wife and they will become one body." So God joined them in one unity. Thus they are no longer "two", but "one" body only. So, what God united, because He saw that "it is a good thing", man must not divide,

because if that should happen, it would no longer be a good thing.»

«Why then did Moses say: “If a man has taken a wife, but she does not find favour with him through something disgraceful, he will give her a writ of dismissal and send her away from his house”?»

«*He said so because of the hardness of your hearts, to avoid, by means of his order, too grave disorders.* That is why' he allowed you to repudiate your wives. *But it was not so from the beginning.* Because a woman is worth more than an animal, which according to the caprice of its master or the free circumstances of nature, copulates with this or that male, a soulless body that copulates for procreation. Your wives have souls, as you do, and it is not fair that you should tread on them pitilessly. If in her condemnation it is said: “You will be subject to the power of your husband and he will lord it over you”, that must take place according to justice and not with arrogance offending against the rights of a free soul worthy of respect. By repudiating your wives, which is not lawful, you give offence to the soul of your companion, to the twin body which joined yours, to the whole woman, whom you married, demanding honesty in her, whilst you, o perjurers, are dishonest, disabled, at times corrupt, when you go to her, and you continue to be so, taking every opportunity to strike her and give a wider scope to your unappeasable lust. Prostitutors of your wives! *On no account can you separate from the woman who is joined to you according to the Law and Blessing.* Only in the case that grace touches you, and you understand that woman is not a possession but a soul, and has therefore equal rights as yours to be recognised as part of man and not an object for his pleasure, and only in the case that your heart is so hard as not to be able to raise her to the dignity of wife, after enjoying her as a prostitute, only to remove the scandal of two who live together without the blessing of God on their union, you may send her away. *Because in that case yours is not union but fornication,* often not honoured by the birth of children, because they are suppressed against nature or sent away as a disgrace. In no other case. *Because if you have illegitimate children from your concubine, it is your duty to put an end to the scandal by marrying her, if you are free.* I am not taking into consideration the case of adultery consumed to the detriment of an unaware wife. In that case the stones of lapidation and the fire of Sheol are holy. But for him who sends away his legitimate wife because he is satiated with her, to take another one, there is but one sentence: *he is an adulterer. And also he who takes the repudiated woman is adulterer,* because if man has arrogated to himself the right to separate what God has joined, *the matrimonial union continues in the eyes of God,* and cursed is the man who

takes a second wife without being a widower. And cursed is he who, after repudiating his wife and abandoning her to the dangers of life, which compel her to get married again to have her daily bread, takes her back when she becomes a widow of her second husband. Because, although she is a widow, she was an adulteress through your fault, and you would redouble her adultery. Have you understood, Pharisees, who are tempting Me?»

They go away thoroughly humiliated, without replying.

«He is a severe man. If He were in Rome He would see that the filth there is even more fetid» says a Roman.

Also some of the Gadara people grumble: «It is difficult to be men, if one must be so chaste!...»

And some say in louder voices: «If that is the situation of a man with respect to his wife, it is better not to get married.»

And the apostles also make the same remarks while they resume going towards the country, after leaving those of Gadara. Judas says so scornfully. James of Zebedee speaks with respect and consideration, and Jesus replies to both of them: «Not everybody understands that properly. Some in fact prefer to remain single in order to be free to indulge their vices. Some to avoid the possibility of sin, not being good husbands. But *only few are granted to understand the beauty of being free from sensuality and also from the honest desire of woman.* And they are the holiest, the freest, the most angelical on the earth. I am referring to *those who become eunuchs for the Kingdom of God.* Some men are born such. Some are made such. The former are monstrosities to be pitied, the latter are abuses to be repressed. But there is a third category: *the voluntary eunuchs, who without any violence against themselves, and thus with double merit, comply with God's request and live like angels,* so that the forlorn altar of the earth may still have flowers and incense for the Lord. They deny their inferior part satisfaction, so that their superior part may grow greater and bloom in Heaven in the flower-beds closest to the throne of the King. And I solemnly tell you that they are not mutilated, on the contrary *they are gifted with what most men lack.* They are thus not the object of foolish sneering words, but of great veneration. Let those understand that who should understand it, and respect it, if they can.»

Those who are married among the apostles whisper to one another. «What is the matter with you?» asks Jesus.

«And what about us? We were not aware of that, and we got married. But we would like to be as You say...» says Bartholomew on behalf of everybody.

«You are not forbidden to do so as from now onwards. *Live continently, considering your companion as a sister* and you will have great merit in the eyes of God. But quicken your steps, so that we may be at Pella before it begins to rain.»

357. At Pella.

12th December 1945.

The road which takes one from Gadara to Pella runs through a fertile area between two rows of hills, one higher than the other. They look like two huge steps of a staircase for fabulous giants, to climb from the Jordan valley up to the Hauran mountains. Where the road runs closer to the western mountain-terrace, the view extends not only as far as the mountains on the other bank, which I think are those of southern Galilee and certainly those of Samaria, but it reaches also the beautiful green vegetation that forms a double hedge along both sides of the blue river. Where, instead, the road is closer to the eastern chain, then one loses sight of the Jordan valley, but the green mountain tops of the Samaria and Galilean chains can still be seen standing out against the grey sky on a sunny day it would be a beautiful view with charming bright hues. But today the sky is already overcast with low clouds, driven by sirocco, which is becoming stronger and stronger and blows fresh masses of clouds onto those already existing, lowering the sky with so much grey ruffled wadding, and thus the view loses its bright green shades, which look toned down as if they were seen through mist.

A village is reached now and again and left behind without anything remarkable happening. The Master is received with and followed by indifference. Only beggars show interest in the group of Galilean pilgrims and ask for alms. And there are the usual blind people whose eyes in most cases have been destroyed by trachoma, or the almost blind people, who walk with lowered heads, as they cannot bear light, along the walls, all alone or in the company of a woman or a boy. In a village, where the road to Pella crosses the Bozrah-Gerasa road to the lake of Tiberias, there is a crowd of blind people who assail the caravans with

their moaning, which resembles the whining of dogs and is interrupted now and again by howling. They are standing against the walls of the first houses, listening, in a group of misery, filth and rags, nibbling bread-crusts and olives, or dozing, while flies feed at will on their ulcerated eye-lids; but at the first noise of hooves or shuffling of feet they all stand up and move like a ragged chorus of an ancient tragedy, uttering the same words and making the same gestures to the new-comers. When a coin or a crust of bread is thrown to them, the blind or half blind people grope in the dust and filth for the offering.

Jesus watches them and says to Simon Zealot and Philip: «Take some money and bread to them. Judas has the money, John the bread.»

The two go away promptly to do what they were told and they stop to speak, while Jesus comes forward slowly, as He is delayed by a line of donkeys, which bar the road.

The beggars are amazed at the greetings and kindness with which they are spoken to and assisted by the new-comers and they asks: «Who are you, who are so kind to us?»

«The disciples of Jesus of Nazareth, the Rabbi of Israel. He, Who loves the poor and the unhappy because He is the Saviour, and He passes by, announcing the Gospel and working miracles.»

«This is the miracle» says one whose eyelids are dreadfully ravaged. And he strikes his clean piece of bread, like an animal that understands and appreciates only material things.

A woman, who is passing by holding copper pitchers and has heard him, says: «Be quiet, you dirty sluggard.» She then addresses the disciples saying: «He is not of our village. He is quarrelsome and violent to his fellow-men. He should be driven away because he robs the poor of the village. But we are afraid he may take vengeance upon us», then in a very low voice, which can hardly be heard, she whispers: «They say that he is a robber and for years he has been robbing and killing, and he came down from the mountains of Caracamoab and Sela, which is now called Petra by the rulers, those who make roads in the deserts. They say that he is a deserter from the army of that Roman who came... to make Rome known... Helius, I think, and another name... If you give him a drink, he will tell you... Now he is blind and he happened to come here... Is that the Saviour?» she asks, pointing at Jesus, Who has gone straight on.

«Yes, He is. Do you want to speak to Him?»

«Oh! no!» says the woman with indifference.

The two apostles say goodbye to her and they set out to join the Master. But a riot breaks out among the blind people while a child is heard weeping. Several people turn round and the woman seen previously, who is now standing at the door of her house, says: «It must be that cruel man taking the money from the weaker ones. He always does that.»

Jesus also turns round to look...

In fact a boy, or rather a youth, comes out of the group bleeding and weeping and he complains: «He took everything from me! And my mother has no more bread!»

Some pity him, some laugh at him...

«Who is he?» Jesus asks the woman.

«A youth from Pella. He is poor and comes here begging. They are all blind in the family, as they have infected one another. The father died and the mother stays at home. The youth asks passersby and peasants for alms.»

The young fellow comes forward with his little stick, wiping his tears and the blood streaming down his forehead with the edge of his worn-out mantle.

The woman calls him: «Stop, Jaia. I will wash your forehead and give you some bread!»

«I had money and bread for several days! I have nothing now! Mother is waiting for me to have something to eat...» complains the unhappy youth while wiping his forehead with the water of the woman.

Jesus moves forward and says: «I will give you what I have. Do not weep.»

«But, Lord! Why? How will we pay for our lodgings? What shall we do?» asks Judas anxiously.

«We will praise the Lord for keeping us healthy. It is a great grace.»

The youth says: «Oh! It is indeed. If I could see! I would work for my mother.»

«Would you like to be cured?»

«Yes, I would.»

«Why do you not go to a doctor?»

«None of them has ever cured us. We have been told that there is One in Galilee, Who is not a doctor, but can cure. But how can one go to Him?»

«Go to Jerusalem. To Gethsemane. It is an olive grove on the side of the mount of Olives near the road to Bethany. Ask for Mark and Jonah. Everyone in the district of Ophel will tell you. You can join a caravan. There are so many going by. Ask Jonah where Jesus of Nazareth is...»

«That's it! That is the name! Will He cure me?»

«He will, if you have faith.»

«I have faith. Where are You going, Who are so good?»

«To Jerusalem, for Passover.»

«Oh! Take me with You. I will not cause You any trouble. I will sleep in the open air and a piece of bread will be quite enough for me! Let us go to Pella... You are going there, are You not? And we will tell my mother, and then we will go... Oh! If I could see! Be good, Lord!...» And the youth kneels down searching for Jesus' feet to kiss them.

«Come. I will take you to the light.»

«May You be blessed!»

They resume walking and Jesus' tapering fingers hold the youth by the arm to guide him with dispatch. And the youth asks: «Who are You? A disciple of the Saviour?»

«No.»

«But do You know Him, at least?»

«Yes, I do.»

«And do You think that He will cure me?»

«I do.»

«But... will He want money? I have none. Doctors ask for so much! We have gone to ruin to be cured...»

«Jesus of Nazareth wants but faith and love.»

«He is very good, then. But You are good, too» says the youth and to take the hand leading him and caress it, he feels the sleeve of the tunic. «What a fine garment You have! You are a gentleman! Are You not ashamed of me, as I am in rags?»

«I am ashamed only of sins, which disgrace man.»

«My fault is that at times I complain of my situation and I want warm clothes, bread, and above all sight.»

Jesus caresses him: «Those are not disgracing faults. But try to avoid even those imperfections and you will be holy.»

«If I get cured, I will no longer have them... Or... I do not get cured, and You will know, and will You prepare me for my destiny, and teach me to become holy like Job?»

«You will be cured. But afterwards, above all afterwards, you must always be happy with your condition even if it is not one of the most pleasant ones.»

They arrive at Pella. The kitchen gardens, which are always met outside towns, show the fertility of the soil through their luxuriant vegetation. Some women working in the fields or busy with their laundry greet Jaia and say to him: «You are back early today. Had you a good day?» Or: «Have you found a protector, poor son?» An elderly woman shouts from the far end of her kitchen garden: «Jaia! If you are hungry there is a plate of soup for you. Or for your mother. Are you going home? Take it.»

«I am going to tell my mother that I am going with this kind gentleman to Jerusalem to be cured. He knows Jesus of Nazareth and will take me there.»

The road, near the gate of Pella, is crowded with people. There are some merchants and also some pilgrims.

A fine looking woman, travelling on a donkey's back, in the company of a maidservant and a servant, turns round on hearing Jesus being mentioned, then draws rein, stops the donkey, dismounts and goes towards Jesus. «Do You know Jesus of Nazareth? Are You going to Him? I am going too... To have a son cured. I would like to speak to the Master because...» she bursts into tears under her thick veil.

«What is the matter with your son? Where is he?»

«He is from Gerasa. But now he is going towards Judaea. He wanders about like one possessed... Oh! What have I said!»

«Is he possessed?»

«Lord, he was and he was cured. Now... he is worse than before because... Oh! I can only tell Jesus of Nazareth!»

«James, take the boy between you and Simon and go on with the others. Wait for Me on the other side of the gate. Woman, you can send your servants on. We will be able to speak to each other, just the two of us.»

The woman says: «But You are not the Nazarene! To Him only I will speak. Because He only can understand and have mercy.»

They are now alone. The others have all gone ahead on their own. Jesus waits until the road is clear and then says: «You may speak. I am Jesus of Nazareth.»

The woman utters a deep groan and is about to fall on her knees.

«No. People must not know for the time being. Let us go. There is a house that is open over there. We will ask them to let us rest and we will be able to speak. Come.»

Along a lane between two kitchen gardens they go to a house of common people where children are romping on the threshing floor.

«Peace be with you. Will you allow Me to let this woman rest here for a few minutes? I must speak to her. We have come from far away to speak to each other and God has made us meet before the appointed place.»

«Come in. A guest is a blessing. We will give you milk and bread and some water for your tired feet» says an old woman.

«It is not necessary. All we need is a quiet place where we can talk.»

«Come» and she takes them to a terrace decked with a vine blossoming with emerald-green leaves.

They are left alone. «Speak, woman. I have already said that God made us meet before the end of our journey, for your relief.»

«There is no more relief for me! I had a son. He became possessed. He behaved like a wild beast among sepulchres. Nothing stopped him. Nothing cured him. He saw You. He adored You with the demon's lips and You cured him. He

wanted to come with You. But You thought of his mother and you sent him to me, to restore my life and mind, which the grief of a possessed son made vacillate. And You sent him also to preach You, since he wanted to love You. Oh!... to be a mother once again... and of a holy son! Of a servant of Yours! But tell me! When You sent him back to me, did You know that he was... that he would become a demon again? Because he is a demon, who has left You after receiving so much good, after knowing You, after being chosen for Heaven... Tell me! Did You know? But I am raving! I am speaking but I have not told You why he is a demon... For some time he has become like a madman again, oh! only a few days! but much more grievous to me than the long years when he was possessed... And then I thought I could never be more grieved than then... He came... he destroyed the faith that Gerasa had for You through Your merit and his, and he spoke infamously of You. And he is preceding You towards the ford of Jericho, doing harm to You!»

The woman, who has never removed the veil behind which she is sobbing desolately, throws herself at Jesus' feet imploring: «Go away! go away! Don't let them insult You! I came away in full agreement with my sick husband, praying God that I would find You. He heard my prayer! Oh! May He be blessed for that! I do not want You, the Saviour, to be ill-treated because of my son! I will not allow that! Oh! why did I bring him into the world? He betrayed You, Lord! He misreports Your words. The demon has taken him once again. And... oh! Most High and Holy Lord! Have mercy on a mother! And he will be damned. My son! Previously it was not his fault if he was possessed by demons. It was a misfortune, which befell him. But now that You had cured him, now that he had known God and had been taught by You! Now he wanted to be a demon and no power will free him again! Oh!» The woman is lying on the ground, a heap of clothes and flesh shaken by sobs. And she moans: «Tell me, tell me, what must I do for You, for my son? To make amends! To save him! No. To make amends! You can see that my grief is atonement. But to save him! I cannot save the disowner of God. He is damned... And what is that to me, an Israelite? It's torture.»

Jesus bends. He lays a hand on her shoulder. «Stand up, calm down! You are dear to Me. Listen, poor mother.»

«Are You not cursing me because I gave birth to him?!»

«Oh! no! You are not responsible for his error, and for your own relief you must know that you can bring about his salvation. The ruin of sons can be repaired by

mothers. And that is what you will do. Your grief, since it is sincere, is not sterile, it is prolific. *The soul you love will be saved through your suffering.* You are expiating for him, and with such righteous intention that *you are the indulgence of your son.* He will go back to God. Do not weep.»

«But when? When?»

«When your tears will dissolve in My Blood.»

«Your Blood? So it is true what he says? That You will be killed because You deserve death?... Horrible blasphemy!»

«The first part is really true. *I shall be killed to make you worthy of Life.* I am the Saviour, woman. *And salvation is granted through word, through mercy and through holocaust.* That is what is required for your son and that is what I will give. *But... help Me. Give Me your grief.* Go with My blessing. Keep it in your heart, so that you may be merciful and patient with your son, and remind him thus, that Another One was merciful to him. Go, go in peace.»

«But You must not speak at Pella. Don't speak in Perea. He has set them against You. And he is not alone. But I see and speak only of him...»

«I will speak by means of a deed. And it will suffice to demolish the work of the others. Go home in peace.»

«Lord, now that You have absolved me for giving birth to him, look at my face, that You may know what the face of a mother is like when her heart is torn to pieces» and she uncovers her face saying: «Here is the face of the mother of *Mark of Josiah*, the denier of the Messiah and the torturer of his mother» and then she lowers the thick veil over her face disfigured by weeping and moans: «No other mother in Israel will be as deep in grief as I am!»

They leave the hospitable house and take to the road again. They enter Pella and the woman joins her servants and Jesus His disciples. But the woman follows Him, as if she were fascinated, while Jesus follows the youth who is going towards his hovel, situated in a basement of a building leaning against the side of the mountain, which is typical of this town built on mountain terraces, so that the ground on the western side is the first floor of the eastern side, but in actual fact, it is ground even there, because one can reach it from the overhanging road, which is on the same level as the top floor. I do not know whether I have made myself understood.

The boy shouts in a loud voice: «Mother! Mother!»

A blind woman, who is still young and moves about freely and easily, as she is familiar with the surroundings, comes out of the dark miserable cave. «Are you already back, my son? Have the alms been so bountiful as to allow you to come back while the sun is still high?»

«Mother, I found one who knows Jesus of Nazareth, and who says he will take me to Him to be cured. He is very kind. Will you let me go, mother?»

«Of course, Jaia! Even if I have to remain alone, you may go, and may you be blessed and look at the Saviour also on my behalf!» The consent and the faith of the woman are total.

Jesus smiles. He says: «Woman, do you not doubt Me or the Saviour?»

«No, I don't. If You know Him and are His friend, You must be good, too. And with regard to Him!... Go, son. Don't wait a moment. Give me a kiss and go with God.»

They kiss each other, groping...

Jesus leaves on the coarse table a loaf of bread and some coins. «Goodbye, woman. You can buy food for yourself with what I left here. Peace be with you.»

They come out. The group resumes walking while the first drops of rain fall. «Are we not stopping? It is raining...» say the apostles.

«We will stop at Jabesh-Gilead. Walk on now.»

They pull their mantles over their heads and Jesus covers the head of the boy with His own. The mother of Mark of Josiah follows Him with her servants, on her little donkey. She seems to be unable to part from Him.

They leave Pella. They advance into the green country, which looks sad in the rainy day.

After about a kilometre Jesus stops. He takes the head of the blind boy in His hands and kisses his blind eyes saying: «And now go back. Go and tell your mother that the Lord rewards those who have faith and tell the people in Pella that I am the Lord.» He lets the boy go and moves away quickly.

But within less than three minutes the boy shouts: «But I can see! Oh! Don't run

away! You are Jesus! Let me see You as the first thing!» and he falls on his knees on the wet road.

The Gerasene woman and her servants on one side, the apostles on the other run to see the miracle.

Jesus also comes back, slowly, smiling. He bends to caress the boy. «Go, go to your mother and believe in Me... always.»

«Yes, my Lord... But nothing for my mother?! Is she to remain in the dark, although she believes as I do?»

Jesus smiles more broadly. He looks around and on the roadside He sees a bunch of daisies wet with rain. He bends and picks them, He blesses them and hands them to the boy. «Pass them on Your mother's eyes, and she will see. I am not coming back. I must go on. Let those who are good follow Me with their souls and speak of Me to those who are doubtful. Speak of Me to the people of Pella, whose faith is wavering. Go. God is with you.»

He then turns to the woman of Gerasa: «And you follow him. This is the reply of God to all those who are trying to weaken the faith of men in the Christ. And let that strengthen your faith and Josiah's. Go in peace.»

They part. Jesus resumes His march southwards. The boy, the Gerasene woman and the servants go northwards. The heavy rain separates them like a veil of smoke...

358. In Matthias' House beyond Jabesh-Gilead.

13th December 1945.

The deep woody valley where Jabesh-Gilead is situated is resounding with a swollen little torrent, which flows foaming towards the nearby Jordan. The dim twilight and dull day increase the gloomy sight of the woods and the village thus looks sad and inhospitable at first sight.

Thomas, who is always good-humoured, notwithstanding that his garments are just as wet as if they had been taken out of a washing tub and he is covered in mud from head to foot, says: «H'm! I would not like this village to revenge itself

on us for the unpleasant surprise they received from Israel. Well, let us go and suffer for the Lord.»

The people did not kill them, that is true, but they drove the apostles away from everywhere, calling them thieves and worse names, and Philip and Matthew had to run as fast as they could, to get rid of a big dog, which a shepherd had set on them, when they knocked at the door of his sheep-fold, asking for shelter for the night «at least under the shed of the sheep».

«What shall we do now?»

«We have no bread.»

«And no money. And without money one can find no bread and no lodgings.»

«And we are wet to the skin, frozen and starving.»

«And it is getting dark. We shall be a lovely sight tomorrow morning, after a night in the wood.»

Seven of the Twelve are grumbling openly, three are clearly dissatisfied, even if they do not say so. Simon Zealot is proceeding with his head lowered and the expression of his face is undecipherable. John is greatly embarrassed and with grievous countenance he casts rapid glances at Jesus and the grumblers alternately. Jesus continues to go personally to knock from door to door, as the apostles refuse to do so, or they do so fearfully, and He patiently walks along the little streets, which have become slippery foul quagmires. But He meets with refusal everywhere.

They are at the end of the village, where the valley widens out on the pastures of the Trans-Jordan plain. There are still a few houses... and each one is a disappointment...

«Let us look in the fields. John, can you climb up that elm-tree? From the top of it you will be able to see.»

«Yes, my Lord.»

«The elm-tree is slippery because of the rain. He will not be able to climb it and he will hurt himself. And we will thus have an injured companion as well» grumbles Peter.

And Jesus replies meekly: «I will climb it, then.»

«Certainly not!» they shout in chorus. And the fishermen shout louder than the others, adding: «If it is dangerous for us fishermen, what do You expect to do if

You have never climbed up masts or ropes?»

«I was going to do it for your sake, to find shelter for you. I do not mind, it is not the rain that troubles Me...» How much sadness! What a sad appeal for loving understanding there is in His voice!

Some listen and become silent. Bartholomew and Matthew say: «It is now too late to do anything. A decision should have been taken earlier.»

«Of course! And not be guided by whim, by deciding to depart from Pella, when it was already raining. You have been obstinate and imprudent and now we are all paying for it. What can You do now? If our purse had been full, all the houses would have been open to us! But You!... Why do You not work a miracle, at least one miracle for Your apostles, since You work miracles even for undeserving people?» says Judas of Kerioth, gesticulating like a madman; he is so aggressive that the others, although they more or less agree with him, feel it is necessary to remind him to respect the Master.

Jesus is already like the Convict looking meekly at His executioners. And He is silent. This silence, which for some time has become more and more frequent in Jesus, foreshadowing His «great silence» before the Sanhedrin, Pilate and Herod, makes me feel so sorry for Him. It reminds me of the silent pauses in the meaning of a dying man, which are not due to soothing of pain, but are the prelude to death. Jesus' silence seems to be much more eloquent than words, as they express all His grief at men's lack of understanding and love. And because of His meekness which does not react and of the lowered posture of His head, He looks as if He were already put in chains and handed over to the hatred of men.

«Why don't You speak?» they ask Him.

«Because I would utter words which your hearts would not understand just now... Let us go. We will walk not to freeze... And forgive Me...»

He turns round quickly, leading the group, while some of its members pity Him, some accuse Him, some contradict their companions.

John remains slowly behind, deliberately avoiding notice by anyone. He then goes towards a very tall tree, a poplar, I think, or an ash-tree, and after taking off his mantle and tunic, he begins to climb it, half naked as he is, with some difficulty, until the first branches make his ascent easier. He climbs up as swiftly as a cat. At times he slips, but he immediately collects himself and is almost at the top. He scans the horizon in the last light of the day, which is clearer here in

the open plain, than in the valley, also because the dark clouds have thinned out. He looks carefully in every direction and at last he makes a gesture of joy. He slides down to the ground very rapidly, puts his clothes on and begins to run. He reaches his companions, overtakes them and is soon beside the Master. Panting because of the effort of climbing and running he says: «There is a hut, Lord... a hut to the east... But we will have to go back... I climbed up a tree... Come...»

«I am going with John this way. If you want to come, do so, otherwise go on as far as the next village on the river. We will meet there» says Jesus seriously and decisively.

Drenched with rain, they all follow Him through the fields.

«But we are going back to Jabesh!»

«I can't see any houses...», «I wonder what the boy has seen!»

«Perhaps a shed.», «Or the hut of a leper.»

«We shall get soaked through. These fields are like sponges» grumble the apostles.

But it is neither a shed nor a leper's hut what appears behind a group of trees. It is a hut, a low large hut like a poor sheep-fold, half of the roof is thatched and the mud walls can hardly support the four pillars made of coarse stone. A pile-work enclosure is around the hovel and inside it there are vegetables dripping water.

John gives a shout. An old man appears. «Who is it?»

«Pilgrims going to Jerusalem. Give us shelter in the name of God!» says Jesus.

«Certainly. It's my duty. But you are unlucky. I have little room and no beds.»

«It does not matter. You will at least have a fire.»

The man bestirs himself at the gate and opens it. «Come in and peace be with you.»

They go through the tiny kitchen garden. They go into the only room which is kitchen and bed room at the same time. A fire is lit in the fireplace. There is order and poverty, and not one utensil more than is necessary.

«See! Only my heart is large and ornate. But if you wish to make the best of it... Have you any bread?»

«No. Just a handful of olives...»

«I have not got enough bread for everybody. But I will prepare something with milk. I have two sheep. They are enough for me. I will go and milk them. Will you give me your mantles? I will hang them up in the fold, at the rear. They will dry a little and tomorrow we will do the rest with the fire.»

The man goes out laden with the damp clothes. They are all standing near the fire enjoying its warmth.

The man comes back with a coarse mat, which he lays on the floor. «Take your sandals off. I will wash the mud off them and hang them up so that they may dry. And I will give you some warm water so that you may wash your feet. The mat is coarse, but it is clean and thick. You will feel it is more comfortable than the cold floor.»

He takes a cauldron full of greenish water, in which some vegetables are boiling, and pours half of it into a basin and half into another vessel. He then adds cold water and says: «There you are. It will refresh you. Wash yourselves. This is a clean cloth.»

In the meantime he busies himself at the fireplace. He makes up the fire, pours the milk into a pot, which he places on the fire. And as soon as it begins to boil he adds some seeds, which look like ground barley or hulled millet. And he stirs the mush.

Jesus, Who is one of the first to wash Himself, approaches him: «May God grant you grace for your charity.»

«I am only giving back what I received from Him. I was a leper. I was a leper from my thirty-seventh to my fifty-first year of age. Then I became cured. But in the village I found that my wife and relatives had died and my house had been plundered. In any case I was the "leper"... So I came here. And I built my home here, by myself and with the help of God. At first I made a hut with bog grass, then a wooden one. Then I built the walls... Something new each year. Last year I built the fold for the sheep. I bought them selling the mats and wooden utensils that I make. I have an apple tree, a pear-tree, a fig-tree and a vine. I grow vegetables in the front of the house and I have a small barley field in the rear. I have four couples of doves and two sheep. I will have lambs before long. And I hope they are ewe-lambs this time. I bless the Lord and I ask for no more. And who are You?»

«A Galilean. Have you a prejudice against them?»

«None, although I am of Judaeen extraction. If I had had children, I could have had one like You... I now act as a father to my doves... I have become accustomed to being alone.»

«And at Festivities?»

«I fill the mangers and go. I hire a donkey. I rush there, do what I have to do and come back. I never had as much as a leaf stolen. God is good.»

«Yes, both to those who are good and those who are not so good. But good people are under His wings.»

«Yes, Isaiah also says so... He protected me, He did.»

«But you were a leper» remarks Thomas.

«And I became poor and was left alone. But, this is a grace of God, to become a man again and to have a roof and bread. Job was my model in misfortune. I hope to deserve the blessing of God, as he did, not in wealth, but in grace.»

«You will receive it. You are a just man. What is your name?»

«Matthias.» He takes the pot off the fire and puts it on the table. He adds butter and honey and puts it back on the fire and says: «I have only six pieces of crockery between plates and bowls. You will have to eat in turn.»

«And what about you?»

«The host is the last to be served. First the brothers sent by God. Here you are. It is ready. And this will do you good.» And he pours ladelfuls of steaming mush into four plates and two bowls. There is no shortage of wooden spoons.

Jesus advises the younger to eat.

«No, You must eat, Master» says John.

«No. Judas had better have his fill, so that he may realise that there is always food for the children.»

The Iscariot changes colour but he eats.

«Are You a rabbi?»

«Yes, I am, and these are My disciples.»

«I used to go to the Baptist, when I was at Bethabara. Do You know anything

about the Messiah? They say that He exists and that John pointed Him out. When I go to Jerusalem I always hope to see Him. But I have never been successful. I fulfill the rite and I do not stop there. Probably that is why I never see Him. I am isolated here and then... The people in Perea are not good. I spoke to some shepherds who come here to pasture. They knew Him and told me about Him. What wonderful words! I wonder how beautiful they must be when spoken by Him!...»

Jesus does not reveal Himself. It is His turn now to eat and He does so peacefully near the good old man.

«And now? What shall we do for beds? I give you my bed. But it is one only... I will go to the sheep-fold.»

«No, we will go there. Hay is good enough for those who are tired.»

The meal is over and they decide to lie down in order to be able to leave at dawn. But the old man insists and Matthew who has a bad cold, sleeps in his bed.

But it is raining torrents at dawn. How can they leave in such heavy rain? They listen to the old man and stay. In the meantime they brush their clothes and dry them, they grease their sandals and rest. The old man cooks barley again in milk for everybody and he puts some apples under the ashes. That is their meal and they are eating it when they hear a voice from outside.

«Another pilgrim? What shall we do?» says the old man. But he gets up, envelops himself in a coarse woollen water-resistant blanket and goes out. It is warm in the kitchen, but there is no good humour in it. Jesus is silent.

The old man comes back with his eyes wide open. He looks at Jesus and then at the others. He seems to be afraid... he looks uncertain and inquisitive. At last he says: «Is the Messiah among you? Tell me, because the people of Pella are looking for Him to adore Him, because of a great miracle He worked. They have been knocking all night at the doors of all the houses as far as the river, as far as the first village... Now, on their way back, they thought of me. Somebody pointed out my house to them. They are outside, in wagons. A large crowd!»

Jesus stands up. The Twelve say: «Don't go. If You said that it was wise to avoid staying at Pella, there is no sense in showing Yourself now.»

«So! O Blessed! You are Blessed and He Who sent You to me. And received You! You are Rabbi Jesus, Who... Oh!» The man is on his knees, with his forehead on the floor.

«Yes, I am. But let Me go to those who are looking for Me. Then I will come to you, My good man.» He frees His ankles from the hands of the old man and goes out into the flooded kitchen garden.

«Here He is! Hosanna!» They jump out of the wagons. There are men and women, the young blind fellow cured yesterday and his mother, and also the Gerasene woman. They kneel down, without paying any attention to the mud and they implore: «Come back with us to Pella.»

«No, to Jabesh» shout other people, obviously from that place. «We want You! We are sorry that we drove You away!» shout those from Jabesh.

«No, to Pella with us, as Your miracle is still alive there. You have given light to their eyes. Give light to our souls.»

«I cannot. I am going to Jerusalem. You will find Me there.»

«You are angry because we expelled You.»

«You are disgusted because You know that we believed the slander of a sinner.»

Mark's mother covers her face weeping.

«Jaia, please tell Him, Who loved you, to come back.»

«You will find Me in Jerusalem. Go and persevere. Do not be like the winds, which blow in every direction. Goodbye.»

«No. Come. We will abduct You, if You do not come.»

«You shall not raise one hand against Me. That is idolatry, not faith. Faith believes even without seeing. It perseveres even when it is persecuted. It grows greater even without miracles. I am staying with Matthias, who believed without seeing anything and who is a just man.»

«At least accept our gifts: money and bread. We have been told that You gave everything You had to Jaia and his mother. Take a wagon. You can travel in it. You will leave it at Jericho, with Timon, the hotel keeper. Take it. It is raining and will rain. You will be sheltered and will travel quicker. Give us a sign that You do not hate us.»

They are on the other side of the fence, Jesus is on this side: they look at one another and those on the other side are full of excitement. Behind Jesus there is old Matthias, on his knees, with his mouth wide open, and then the apostles, who are all standing.

Jesus stretches out His hand saying: «I will accept your offerings for the poor. But I will not accept the wagon. I am the Poor One among the poor. Please do not insist. Jaia, and you, woman, and you from Gerasa, come here, that I may give you a special blessing.» And when they approach Him, as Matthias has opened the fence, He caresses, blesses and dismisses them. He then blesses all those who have crowded at the gate to give the apostles money and foodstuffs and He dismisses them.

He goes back into the house...

«Why did You not speak to them?»

«The miracle of the two blind people is My sermon.»

«Why did You not accept the wagon?»

«Because it is better to travel on foot.» And He addresses Matthias: «I would have rewarded you with My blessings. I can now add a little money to cover the expenses that you have met...»

«No, Lord Jesus... I don't want it. I did that wholeheartedly. And I am doing it now to serve the Lord. The Lord does not pay. He is not obliged to pay. I am the one who received, not You! Oh! this day! It will come with me, with its recollections, as far as the next life!»

«You are right! You will find your mercy towards pilgrims written in Heaven, as well as your prompt faith... As soon as it clears up a little, I will leave you. Those people might come back. They insist as long as they are roused by miracles, then they become as torpid as they were before, or even hostile. I will proceed. So far I have stopped trying to convert them. I now come and pass by, without stopping. I am going towards My destiny, which urges Me. God and man urge Me and I can no longer stop. Love and hatred spur Me. Let those who love Me, follow Me. But the Master will no longer run after indocile sheep.»

«Do they not love You, divine Master?» asks Matthias.

«They do not understand Me.»

«They are wicked.»

«Lust makes them dull.»

Old Matthias no longer dare be as confidential as he was previously. He seems to be standing in front of an altar. Jesus, on the contrary, since He is no longer the Unknown One, is less reserved and speaks to the old man as if he were a relative.

The hours thus go by until early afternoon. The clouds begin to dissipate, promising the end of the rain. Jesus gives order to depart. And while the old man goes to get the dry mantels, He puts some coins in a box and has some bread and cheese put into a kitchen cupboard.

The old man comes back and Jesus blesses him. He then takes to the road again, turning round now and again to look at the white head leaning over the dark fence.

359. Rose of Jericho.

14th December 1945.

The plain on the eastern bank of the Jordan is like a lagoon because of the continuous rain, particularly where Jesus and the apostles are just now. They have just crossed a torrent that flows down from a narrow gorge in the nearby hills, which seem to form a Cyclopean dam, from north to south, along the Jordan, interrupted now and again by narrow valleys in which torrents inevitably flow. It looks as if God had placed here a range of hills, shaped like a huge scallop-edge, as a contour to the large Jordan valley. I would say that it is a rather monotonous scallop-edging, as its projections, aspects and distances are so much alike. The apostolic group is between the last two torrents, which have overflowed their banks and are thus wider, particularly the southern one, as it conveys an imposing mass of water from the mountains and it roars turbulently towards the Jordan. One can hear also the roar of the river, particularly where its natural bends, which I would say are like continuous narrowings, or the confluence of affluents, cause obstructions to the water. Well, Jesus is in this truncated triangle, formed by three watercourses in flood, and it is not an easy

task to lift one's feet out of that quagmire.

The apostolic humour is duller than the weather. And that say everything. Each one wishes to express his own opinion. And everything they say implies reproach, although expressed as advice. It is the moment of sentences like: «I told you», or «If You had done what I suggested» etc. which annoy so much anybody who has made a mistake and is already depressed at having made it.

Some say: «It was better to cross the river in the Pella area and then proceed on the other side, which is not so bad», or «We ought to have taken the wagon! We wanted to be clever, and then...», and some remark: «If we had stayed up on the mountains, there would not have been all this mud!»

John says: «You are prophets of past events. Who foresaw all this rain?»

«This is its time. It should have been foreseen» remarks Bartholomew.

«In past years it was not like this before Passover. I came to you and the Kidron was certainly not in spate and last year we had a spell of drought. You are complaining, and you have forgotten how much we suffered from thirst in the Philistine plain!» says the Zealot.

«Eh! Of course! The two wise men have spoken and they contradict us!» says Judas of Kerioth ironically.

«You ought to be quiet. You are good only at criticising. But at the right moment, when one should speak to a Pharisee or the like, you are always silent, as if your tongue had been tied» Thaddeus says to him angrily.

«Yes. He is right. Why did you not answer one word to those three snakes in the last village? You were aware that we had been to Giscala and Meiron, that we behaved respectfully and that it was the Master Himself Who wanted to go there, as He respects the great dead rabbis. But you did not say anything! You know how He expects us to respect the Law and priests. But you did not say one word! But you are speaking now, because there is the opportunity of speaking ironically of the best ones among us and you are criticising what the Master does» insists Andrew, who is usually patient, but today is very irritable.

«Will you be quiet! Judas is wrong, he who is the friend of many, too many Samaritans...»

«Me? Who are they? Mention their names, if you can.»

«Yes, my dear! All the Pharisees, Sadducees and powerful people of whose friendship you brag so much and who certainly know you. They never greet me. But they greet you!»

«You are jealous! But I am one of the Temple, you are not.»

«Thanks be to God, I am a fisherman. Yes, and I am proud of it.»

«So stupid a fisherman that you could not even foresee this weather.»

«No! I said: "If the new moon of Nisan is wet, rain in torrents one may expect"» replies Peter.

«Ah! I caught you! And what do you say, Judas of Alphaeus? And you, Andrew? Peter also, our Head, criticises the Master!»

«I am not criticising anybody. I quoted a proverb.»

«Which is criticism and reproach for anyone who can understand it.»

«Yes... but I don't think that will help to dry the ground. We are now here and we will have to stay here. Let us spare our breath to get our feet out of this quagmire» says Thomas.

And what about Jesus? Jesus is silent. He is a little ahead of everybody, wallowing in mud, or looking for emerging turves. But even they splash water up to half of one's shin, as soon as one treads on them, as if they were bladders and not turves. He is silent and lets them speak, discontented as they are, behaving just like men, nothing more than men, whom the least inconvenience makes irritable and unfair.

The most southern of the rivers is now close at hand, and when Jesus sees a man on muleback pass along the flooded bank, He asks him: «Where is the bridge?»

«Farther up. I am crossing there as well. The other one, the one farther down the valley, the Roman bridge, is already under water.»

They all grumble again... in chorus. But they hasten to follow the man who is speaking to Jesus.

«But You had better follow the mountain path» he says. And he concludes: «Come back to the plain when you find the third river after the Yaloc. You will then be near the ford. But make haste. Don't stop. Because the river is swelling hourly. What a terrible season! Frost first, then rain. And so heavy! It's a

punishment of God. But it is just! When we do not stone the blasphemers of the Law, God punishes us. And we have many of them! You are a Galilean, are You not? So You will know the One from Nazareth, Whom good people are now leaving because He is the cause of all troubles. His words attract thunderbolts! Such punishments! You should hear what those, who were with Him, say about Him. The Pharisees are right in persecuting Him. He must be a great robber. And he must frighten people as if he were Beelzebub. I wanted to go and hear Him, because previously they spoke so highly of Him. But... it was the men of his gang who spoke so. People without scruples like Him. Good people are now abandoning Him. And quite rightly. I am not going to see Him any more. And if by chance I should come across Him, I will pelt Him with stones, as it is our duty to do with blasphemers.»

«Stone Me, then. I am Jesus of Nazareth. I am not running away, neither will I curse you. I have come to redeem the world by shedding My Blood. Here I am. You may sacrifice Me, but become a just man.»

Jesus says so opening His arms a little towards the ground, He speaks slowly, meekly and sadly. But if He had cursed the man, He would not have impressed him more; in fact he draws reins so abruptly that the mule swerves and nearly falls from the embankment into the river in spate. Jesus seizes the bit and holds the animal, just in time to save man and mule.

The man does nothing but repeat: «You! You!...» and seeing the gesture that has saved him, he shouts: «But I told You that I would stone You... Do You not understand?»

«And I tell you that I forgive you and that I will suffer for you as well, to redeem you. That is the Saviour.»

The man looks at Him again, he spurs his mule and runs away... He flies away... Jesus lowers His head...

The apostles feel that it is necessary to forget mud, rain and all the other miseries, in order to comfort Him. They gather round Him and say: «Do not grieve! We are in no need of bandits. And that is what he is. Because only a wicked person can believe such slander and be afraid of You.»

«But» they also say «how unwise of You, Master! And if he hurt You? Why say that You are Jesus of Nazareth?»

«Because it is the truth... Let us go towards the mountains as he suggested. We

will lose a day, but you will get out of the quagmire.»

«And You, too» they remark.

«Oh! It does not concern Me. It is the quagmire of dead souls that worries Me» and tears stream down His face.

«Do not weep, Master. We grumble, but we love You. If we should meet Your slanderers, we will take vengeance upon them.»

«You shall forgive, as I do. But let Me weep. I am the Man, after all! And it grieves Me to be betrayed, disowned, abandoned!»

«Look at us, consider us. We are few but good. None of us will betray or abandon You. Believe us, Master.»

«Certain things should not even be mentioned! The thought that we may betray You, is an insult to our souls!» exclaims the Iscariot.

But Jesus is distressed. Silent slow tears stream down the pale cheeks of His tired emaciated face.

They approach the mountains. «Shall we go up there or shall we go along the foot? There are villages half way up the hills. Look. On both sides of the river» they point out to Him.

«It is getting dark. Let us try and reach a village, any village at all.» Judas Thaddeus, whose eye sight is very good, scans the sides of the mountains. He approaches Jesus and says: «In case of need there are fissures in the mountains. Can You see them there? We can take shelter in them. It will be better than being in mud.»

«We will light a fire» says Andrew to console everybody.

«What? With damp wood?» asks Judas of Kerioth ironically.

No one replies to him. Peter whispers: «I bless the Eternal Father that neither the women nor Marjiam are with us.»

They cross the bridge, a very old one, at the foot of the valley and they go along its southern side, on a mule-track, to a village. It is getting dark very quickly, so much so that they decide to take shelter in a large cave to avoid a heavy shower. The grotto is probably used as a shelter place by shepherds, because there is straw, dirt and a rough fireplace.

«It is of no use as a bed. But to light a fire...» says Thomas pointing at the dirty twigs spread on the ground together with dry ferns and branches of juniper and similar plants. He draws them with a stick close to the fireplace, and once he has made a heap of them, he sets them alight.

Smoke and foul smell rise from the fire together with the smell of resins and juniper. Yet the warmth of the fire is pleasant and they all form a semicircle round it, eating bread and cheese in the flickering light of the flames.

«We could have tried to reach the village» says Matthew, who is hoarse and is suffering from a cold.

«What? To go through the same trouble as three nights ago? No one will drive us away here. We will sit on those logs over there and keep the fire going as long as we can. We can now see that there is plenty wood in here! Look! And straw! It is a sheep-fold, which they use in summer or when they migrate. And what is this? Where does this take to? Take a branch aflame, Andrew, as I want to see» says Peter, who is moving about curiously. Andrew obeys. They slip through a narrow fissure in a wall of the grotto.

«Make sure there are no unpleasant beasts in there!» shout the others.

«Or lepers» says Thaddeus.

After a moment Peter's voice can be heard: «Come, come in here. It's much better here. It is clean and dry and there are some wooden benches and firewood. It's a palace for us! Bring some of the burning branches, so that we may light a fire at once.»

It must be a shelter for shepherds. And this is the grotto where some sleep while the others, who are on guard, watch the sheep. It is an excavation in the mountain, much smaller than the other one, and probably made by man, or at least enlarged and reinforced by means of poles supporting the vault. A very old rustic chimney is bent in the shape of a hook towards the outer cave, to draw the Smoke that otherwise would have no outlet. Rough benches and straw are placed against the walls, in which there are some hooks to hang up lamps, clothes or bags.

«Lovely! Let us make a big fire! We shall be warm and our mantles will dry. Give me your belts: we will join them together and hang our mantles on them» says Peter, while he sorts out benches and straw. And he concludes: «And now we will sleep and keep the fire burning in turns, so that we shall have light and

shall be warm. What a grace of God!»

Judas grumbles between his teeth. Peter turns round angrily. «This is a royal palace, as compared to the grotto in Bethlehem, where the Lord was born. If He was born there, we can spend a night here.»

«And it is also more beautiful than the grottoes at Arbela. There was nothing beautiful there, except our hearts, which were kinder then» says John and he gets lost in his mystical remembrance.

«And it is also much better than the one where the Master stayed to prepare Himself for the office of a preacher» says the Zealot gravely, looking at the Iscariot as if he wanted to tell him to stop it.

Jesus is the last to speak: «And it is by far warmer and more comfortable than the one in which I did penance for you, Judas of Simon, in this month of Tebeth.»

«Penance for me? Why? There was no need of it!»

«Really, you and I ought to spend our lives in penance to free you from what overburdens you. And still... it would not be enough.»

The sentence, pronounced calmly but decidedly, drops like a thunderbolt on the dumbfounded group... Judas lowers his head and withdraws to a corner. He dare not react.

«I will remain awake and look after the fire. You can sleep» orders Jesus after some time.

And shortly afterwards, the heavy breathing of the tired Twelve, lying on the benches among the straw, mingles with the crackling of the fire. And when the straw falls off anyone, leaving his body uncovered, Jesus gets up and covers him again, with the loving care of a mother. And He weeps while contemplating the hermetic faces of some of His sleeping apostles, some in fact are placid, some worried. He looks at the Iscariot, who seems to be grinning also in his sleep, with a grim countenance and clenched fists... He looks at John sleeping with one hand under his cheek, while his rosy face is veiled by his fair hair, and he looks as serene as a child in a cradle. He looks at the honest face of Peter, at the severe face of Nathanael, at the pock-marked face of the Zealot and at the aristocratic one of His cousin Judas. And He contemplates for a long time James of Alphaeus who is so much like a very young Joseph of Nazareth. He smiles upon

hearing the monologues of Thomas and Andrew, who appear to be speaking of the Master. He carefully covers Matthew who is breathing with difficulty, and He gets more straw with which He covers his feet, after warming it near the fire. He smiles hearing James proclaim: «Believe in the Master and you will have Life»... and continue to speak to people in his dream. And He bends to pick up a bag in which Philip keeps dear souvenirs, and lays it gently under his head. And in the intervals He meditates and prays...

The Zealot is the first to awake. He sees Jesus near the fire in the pleasantly warm grotto. And from the pile of wood of which there is hardly anything left, he understands that many hours have gone by. He gets up from his straw-bed and approaches the Master on tip-toe. «Master, are You not going to sleep? I will watch.»

«It is dawn, Simon. I was out there a little while ago and I saw that the sky is beginning to grow light.»

«Why did You not call us? You are tired, too!»

«Oh! Simon! I needed to think... and to pray so much» and He leans His head on the apostle's chest.

The Zealot, standing close to the Master, Who is sat, caresses Him and sighs. He asks: «To think of what, Master? There is no need for You to think, as You know everything.»

«I need not think of what I have to say, but I must think of what I have to do. I am disarmed against the shrewd world, because I do not possess the wickedness of the world or the cunning of Satan. And the world defeats Me... And I am so tired...»

«And sorrowful. And we help in increasing Your grief, dear Master, Whom we do not deserve. Forgive me and my companions ask you on behalf of everybody.»

«I love you so much... I suffer so much... Why do you not understand Me so often?»

Their whispering awakes John, who is closest to them. He opens his blue eyes, looks around in amazement, he then remembers and gets up at once, and he comes behind the two who are talking. He hears Jesus' words: «Your love and

your understanding would be quite enough to make all hatred and misunderstanding become a mere trifle, which I could easily bear... Instead you do not understand... And that is My first torment. And a very heavy one! But it is not your fault... You are men... You will regret not having understood Me, when you can no longer make amends... And as you will then expiate your present superficiality, meanness and dullness, I forgive you and I say before time: "Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing or the grief they are causing Me."»

John slides forwards on to his knees, he embraces the knees of his grieved Jesus and is on the point of bursting into tears when he whispers: «Oh! My Master!»

The Zealot, on whose chest Jesus' head is still resting, bends to kiss His hair saying: «And yet we love You so much! But we would expect in You the ability to defend Yourself and us and to triumph. It disheartens us to see that You are a man, subject to men, to the inclemency of the weather, to misery, to wickedness, to the needs of life... We are foolish. But it is so. As far as we are concerned You are the King, the Triumpher, God. We fail to understand Your sublime self-abnegation to all that for our sake. Because You only are capable of loving. We are not...»

«Yes, Master. Simon is right. We cannot love as God loves: as You do. And we mistake for weakness what is infinite goodness and infinite love and we take advantage of it... Increase our love, increase Your love, and as You are its source, let it overflow, as rivers are now overflowing, soak us in it, sate us with it, like the meadows along the valley. No wisdom, no worth or austerity is required to be perfect as You want us. Love is sufficient... Lord, and I confess, also on behalf of everybody, that we do not know how to love.»

«You, the two who understand more, are accusing yourselves. You are humility. But humility is love. Only a screen prevents the others from being like you. And I will demolish it. Because I am King, Victor and God forever. But now I am the Man. My forehead is already weighed under the torture of My crown. It has always been a torturing crown to be the Man... Thank you, My friends. You have comforted Me. Because this is the advantage of being men: *to have a loving mother and loyal friends*. Let us call your companions. It is no longer raining. Our mantles are dry and our bodies well rested. You may eat and then let us go.»

He raises His voice slowly until the words «let us go» become a definite order.

They all get up and regret having slept all the time while Jesus was watching. They tidy themselves, they have something to eat, take their mantles, put out the fire, and go out on the damp path and begin to descend down to the mule-track that follows the hillside and is not a quagmire because of its steepness. The light is still dim because the sky is overcast and there is no sunshine. But it is sufficient to see.

Andrew and the two sons of Alphaeus are ahead of them all. At a certain moment they stop, they look and run back. «There is a woman. She seems to be dead! She bars the way.»

«Oh! What a nuisance! It's a bad start. What shall we do now? We will have to purify ourselves!» It is the first grumbling of the day.

«Let us go and see whether she is dead» says Thomas to Judas Iscariot.

«I'm certainly not going» replies the Iscariot.

«I will come with you, Tom» says the Zealot and he goes ahead. They approach her, then bend and Thomas runs back shouting.

«She was probably murdered» says James of Zebedee.

«Or she died with cold» replies Philip.

But Thomas joins them and shouts: «She has on the torn garment of lepers...» and he is so frightened that he seems to have seen the devil.

«But is she dead?» they ask him. «Who knows? I ran away.»

The Zealot stands up and comes at once towards Jesus. He says: «Master, a leper sister. I do not know whether she is dead. I do not think so. Her heart seems to be beating.»

«Did you touch her?!» shout many of them, moving away.

«Yes, I did. I am not afraid of leprosy since I have been with Jesus. And I feel sorry for her because I know what it is to be a leper. Perhaps the poor woman has been struck, because her head is bleeding. Perhaps she came down here looking for food. It is dreadful, you know, to die of starvation and to have to defy men to get some bread.»

«Is she run down?»

«No, and I do not know why she is among lepers. She has neither scabs, nor

sores nor gangrene. Perhaps she has not been here very long. Come, Master, please. Have mercy on a leper sister as you had on me!»

«Let us go. Give Me some bread, cheese and the little wine that is still left.»

«You are not going to let her drink where we drink!» shouts the Iscariot struck with terror.

«Be not afraid. She will drink from My hand. Come, Simon.»

They go... but curiosity spurs the others to follow them. Without being annoyed at the water on the foliage and that drops on their heads from the shaken branches, and without minding the soaking moss, they climb up the hillside to see without being near the woman. And they see Jesus bend, take her by her armpits and make her sit against a rock. Her head hangs, as if she were dead.

«Simon, hold her head back so that I may pour a little wine into her mouth.»

The Zealot obeys without fear and Jesus, holding the gourd high up lets a few drops of wine fall between her half-open deathly pale lips. And He says: «The poor woman is frozen! And she is soaked.»

«If she were not a leper, we could take her where we were» says Andrew who is deeply moved.

«That would be the last straw!» exclaims Judas.

«But if she is not a leper! There is no sign of leprosy on her.»

«She has the garment. That's enough.»

The wine in the meantime has its effect. The woman sighs wearily. Jesus pours some into her mouth ensuring that she swallows it. The woman opens her dimmed frightened eyes. She sees the men.

She tries to stand up and run away shouting: «I am infected!» But her strength does not support her. She covers her face with her hands moaning: «Don't stone me! I came down because I am hungry... No one has thrown anything to me for three days...»

«There is bread and cheese here. Eat it. Do not be afraid. Drink a little wine out of My hand» says Jesus pouring some wine into the hollow of His hand and giving it to her.

«But are You not afraid?» says the poor wretch who is dumbfounded.

«I am not afraid» replies Jesus. And He smiles standing up, but He remains near the woman who eats the bread and cheese avidly. She looks like a starving animal. She pants in her anxiety to nourish herself.

Then, after she appeases the gnawing hunger of her empty stomach, she looks around... She counts in a loud voice: «One... two... three... thirteen... So? Oh! Who is the Nazarene? You are, are You not? You are the only one who can pity a poor leper...» The woman goes on her knees with difficulty owing to her weakness.

«Yes, I am. What do you want? To be cured?»

«Also that... But I must tell You something first... I knew about You. Some passersby told me some time ago... A long time ago? No. It was in autumn. But for a leper... every day is a year... I would have liked to see You. But how could I come to Judaea, to Galilee? They call me “the leper woman”. But I have only one sore on my breast and I got it from my husband, who married me when I was a virgin and healthy, but he was not healthy. But he is a mighty one... and can do anything, even saying that I had betrayed him as I was ill when I married him. He thus repudiated me to take another woman with whom he had fallen in love. He denounced me as a leper and as I wanted to exculpate myself, I was pelted with stones. Was that fair, Lord? Yesterday evening a man passed through Bethjabbok saying that You were coming and that he was coming to drive You away. I was there... I came down as far as the houses because I was hungry. I would have rummaged among dunghills to find something to eat... I, who was once “the lady”, would have tried to snatch some sour chicken-feed from poultry...»

She weeps... Then she resumes: «My anxiety to find You, to say to You on Your behalf: “Go away!”, and on my behalf: “Have mercy on me!”, made me forget that, contrary to our law, dogs, pigs and poultry are allowed to live near houses in Israel, but a leper cannot come down to ask for some bread, not even if a woman is a leper only by name. And I came down, asking where You were. As I was in the shade they did not see me at once and they said to me: “He is coming along the embankment of the river.” Then they saw me and they gave me stones instead of bread. I ran away in the night to come and meet You and to escape the rogues. I was hungry, cold and afraid. I fell where You found me. Just here. I thought I was going to die. Instead I found You. Lord, I am not a leper. But this scab here on my breast prevents me from going back among the living. I do not ask to become once again Rose of Jericho as in the days of my father, but at

least to be allowed to live among men and to follow You. Those who spoke to me in October told me that You have women disciples and that You were with them... But first save Your own life. Do not die, You are so good!»

«I will not die until My hour comes. Go over there, to that rock. There is a safe grotto. Have a rest and then go to the priest.»

«Why, Lord?» asks the woman trembling with anxiety.

Jesus smiles: «Become once again the Rose of Jericho that blooms in the desert and is always alive, even when it appears to be dead. Your faith has cured you.»

The woman half-opens her dress over her breast, she looks and shouts: «There is nothing now! Oh! Lord, my God!» and she prostrates herself on the ground.

«Give her bread and some food. And you, Matthew, give her a pair of your sandals. I will give her a mantle. She will then be able to go to a priest, after she has refreshed herself. Give her also the offering for the purification, Judas. We will wait for her at Gethsemane to give her to Eliza, who asked Me to let her have a daughter.»

«No, Lord, I do not want to rest. I will go at once, immediately.»

«Go down to the river, then. Wash yourself and put on the mantle...»

«Lord, I will give my leper sister one. Let me do it and I will take her to Eliza. I will be cured a second time as I will see myself in her and so happily» says the Zealot.

«Do as you wish. Give her what she needs. Woman, listen to Me carefully. You will go and be purified, then you will go to Bethany and you will look for Lazarus, and you will ask him to give you hospitality until I arrive. Go in peace.»

«Lord! When will I be able to kiss Your feet?»

«Soon. Go. But you must be aware that only sin disgusts Me. And forgive your husband, because through him you found Me.»

«That is true. I forgive him. I am going... Oh! Lord! Do not stop here where they hate You. Remember that I walked all night, although I was exhausted, to come and tell You and that if I had met other people, instead of meeting You, I might have been stoned like a snake.»

«I will remember. Go, woman. Burn your clothes. Go with her, Simon. We will follow you and will join you at the bridge.»

They part.

«Now we must all purify ourselves. We are all unclean.»

«It was not leprosy, Judas of Simon. I can assure you.»

«Well, I will purify myself. I do not want uncleanness on me.»

«What a snow-white lily!» exclaims Peter. «If the Lord does not feel unclean, how can you feel so?»

«And because of a woman who the Lord said was not a leper? But what was the matter with her, Master? Did You see her scab?»

«Yes. A fruit of male lewdness. But it was not leprosy. And if the man had been honest, he would not have rejected her, because he was more affected by disease than she was. But lewd people take advantage of everything to satisfy their lust. Judas, if You wish, you may go. We will meet at Gethsemane. And purify yourself! But the first purification is sincerity. You are a hypocrite. Remember that. But you may go.»

«No, I will stay. If you say so, I believe You. So I am not unclean and I will stay with You. You mean that I am lustful and that I was taking advantage of the situation to... I am now proving that You are my love.»

They go quickly down the hill.

15th December.

Jesus says:

«You will put here the vision of the “Miracle of the Jordan in flood”, which you had on September 17th, 1944.»

360. Miracle on the Jordan in Flood.**17th September 1944.**

At last I can write what has kept my mental sight and hearing busy as from early dawn this morning, making me suffer from the strain in hearing the noise of worldly matters from outside and in the house, while I must see and hear the things of God, and making me impatient of everything different from what my spirit sees.

How much patience is required... not to lose my patience while waiting for the moment to say to Jesus: «Here I am! Now You can go on!» Because – I have said so many times and I will repeat it when I cannot continue or begin to write what I see, the scene stops at the very beginning or when I am interrupted, and is resumed again when I am free to follow it. I think that God wants that so that I may not omit any detail or make even a slight error, what might happen if I had to write some time after seeing.

I can assure you in all conscience that what I write, because I see or hear it, I do write it while seeing or hearing.

So here is what I have been seeing as from this morning, and my internal warner tells me that it is the beginning of a beautiful long vision.

In very stormy weather Jesus is walking along a very muddy country road. The road is a little river of yellowish sticky mud, which splashes at each step, is as slippery as soft soap, sticks to sandals, it sucks them like a sucker and at the same time it slips under them, making it thus most painful to walk.

It must have rained continuously during those days. And the sky promises more rain, covered as it is with dark low clouds blown by sirocco or north-east winds, which make the air so heavy that it tastes, in one's mouth, sickly sweet, like a sweetish coating. No relief is brought by the wind that blows bending grass and branches, then stops and everything becomes heavily immobile in the stormy sultriness. Now and again a huge cloud bursts and large warm drops, which seem to be coming from a hot shower, reach the ground forming bubbles in the mud that splashes garments and legs even more.

Although Jesus and His apostles have pulled up their tunics, bagging them at their waists with the cords used as belts, the lower part of their tunics is completely splashed with mud, which is damp at the bottom but almost dry higher up. Their mantles also, which they carry as high as possible, and have

folded in two, both to keep them clean and to have double protection against the short but heavy showers, are completely soiled. On their feet and their legs, up to half their shins, they seem to be wearing thick coarse woollen stockings, it is instead mud encrusted on them.

So far the beginning. It now continues.

The disciples complain a little of the weather and of the road, and we may as well say so, of the Master's not very healthy liking for going about in such weather.

Jesus does not seem to hear. But He does. And two or three times He turns slightly round – they are walking in single file to keep to the left hand side of the road, which is a little higher than the right hand side and thus not so muddy – to look at them. But He does not say anything.

The last time it was the oldest of the disciples who said: «Oh! poor me! With all this dampness that is drying on me I am going to be tortured by pain! I am old! I am no longer thirty years old!»

And Matthew grumbles, too: «And what about me? I was not used to this... When it rained at Capernaum, and you know very well, Peter, I did not go out. I put servants at the tax-bench and they brought me the people who had to pay. I organised a proper service for that. Of course... who would venture to go out in nasty weather? H'm! Only a melancholy fellow, but no one else. Markets and marches are done in good weather...»

«Be quiet! Because He will hear you!» says John.

«No, He will not hear us! He is thinking and when He thinks... we practically do not exist» says Thomas.

«And when He takes an idea into His head, there is no reason whatsoever that may move Him from His determination. He will do what He wants. He trusts no one but Himself and that will be His ruin. If He only consulted a little with me... I am aware of so many things!» says Judas with the self-sufficiency of a «sagacious man who is more clever than anybody else».

«What do you know?» asks Peter at once and he has become as red as a beetroot. «You know everything! What friends have you got? Are you perhaps a great man in Israel? Away you go! You are a poor man like me and the others... A little more handsome... But handsomeness of youth is a flower that lasts one

day! I was handsome, too!»

A hearty laugh of John clears the atmosphere. Also the others laugh and joke at Peter's wrinkles, at his legs, which are wide apart like the legs of every sailor, at his goggle-eyes reddened by the winds of the lake.

«You may laugh, but it is so. In any case, do not interrupt me. Tell me, Judas. What friends have you got? What do you know? If you know what you want us to believe that you know, you must have friends among Jesus' enemies. And who has friends among enemies, is a traitor. Hey! boy! Be careful, if your handsomeness matters to you! Because if it is true that I am no longer handsome, it is also true that I am still strong and I would have no difficulty in giving you a thrashing» says Peter.

«What a manner of speaking! The language of a rude fisherman!» says Judas with the contempt of an offended prince.

«Yes, sir, and I am proud of it. A fisherman, but as sincere as my lake, which, if it is going to be stormy, does not say: "I'll be dead calm", but it stirs and puts such clouds as witnesses in the vault of heaven, that if one is not a fool or drunk, one realises its meaning and acts accordingly. You... you look like this mud that seems to be hard, but look» (and with a sudden jerk of his foot he splashes the mud up to the chin of the handsome Iscariot).

«Peter! Your manners are disgusting! The Master's words on charity have a lovely effect on you!»

«The same applies to you with regard to His words on humility and sincerity. Come on. Spit it out! What do you know? Is it true that you know or do you give yourself airs to make people believe that you have powerful friends? You are a poor worm!»

«I know what I know, and I am not going to tell you to start a brawl, which you, being a Galilean, would like. I would repeat that if the Master were less obstinate, it would be much better. And He ought to be less violent. People get tired of being offended.»

«Violent? If He were, He should throw you into the river, at once. He should make you fly over those trees. You would thus wash off the mud that soils your profile. I wish it would help to wash your heart, which, if I am not mistaken, is more crusty than my muddy legs.» As Peter, in fact, is hairy and short, his legs are very muddy. Both his and Matthew's legs seem to be made of clay up to

their knees.

«Will You stop it!» says Matthew.

John, who has noticed that Jesus has slackened His pace, suspects that He may have heard, and quickening his pace, he overtakes two or three companions, he reaches Jesus and walking beside Him, he calls Him: «Master!» very gently, as usual, and with a loving glance, looking up at Him, as he is shorter and also because he is in the middle of the road, beyond the little rising of the ground on which they are all walking.

«Oh! John! You have reached Me!» says Jesus smiling at him.

John, studying His face with love and anxiety to find out whether He has heard, replies: «Yes, my dear Master. Do You want me?»

«I always want you. I would like all of you, with hearts like yours! But if you continue to walk where you are, you will get drenched.»

«It does not matter, Master! Nothing matters, as long as I am near You!»

«Do you always want to be with Me? Do you not think that I am imprudent and I may cause trouble to you as well? Do you not feel offended because I do not listen to your advice?»

«Oh! Master! So You have heard!» John is dismayed.

«I heard everything. From the very first words. But do not be upset about that. None of you is perfect. I knew since I chose you. And I do not expect any of you to become perfect rapidly. You will all have to change from wild to domestic beings by means of two grafts...»

«Which ones, Master?»

«One is blood, the other is fire. Afterwards you will be the heroes of Heaven and will convert the whole world, beginning from yourselves.»

«Blood? Fire?»

«Yes, John. Blood: Mine...»

«No, Jesus!» John interrupts Him with a deep groan.

«Be calm, My friend. Do not interrupt Me. Be the first to listen to this truth, because you deserve it. The Blood is Mine. You already know. That is why I

came. I am the Redeemer... Think of the prophets. They did not leave out one iota in describing My mission. I will be the Man described by Isaiah. And the Blood, which I will shed, will fecundate you. But I will not confine Myself to that. You are so imperfect and weak, dull and timorous, that I, sitting gloriously beside the Father, will send you the Fire, the Strength that proceeds from My being through generation by the Father and that binds the Father and the Son in an indissoluble ring, making Three of One: the Thought, the Blood, the Love. When the Spirit of God, nay, *the Spirit of the Spirit of God*, the Perfection of Divine Perfections, will come to you, you will no longer be as you are. But you will be new, powerful, holy... But for one of you Blood and Fire will be of no avail. Because Blood will have for him the power of damnation and he will forever know another fire, in which he will burn belching blood and swallowing blood, because he will see blood wherever he lays his material or spiritual eyes, having betrayed the Blood of a God.»

«Oh! Master! Who is it?»

«You will know one day. For the time being, forget about it. And for the sake of charity do not even endeavour to inquire into it. Investigation presupposes suspicion. You must not suspect Your brothers, because suspicion is already lack of charity.»

«I will be satisfied if You assure me that neither James nor I will betray You.»

«Oh! Not you! Nor James. You are My comfort, My good John!» and Jesus lays an arm on his shoulders, draws him to Himself and they walk thus together.

They are silent for some time. The others also are quiet. Only the shuffling of their feet in the mire can be heard. They then hear another noise. It is a rustling gurgling noise, I would say the deep snoring of a person affected by catarrh. It is a monotonous grumbling interrupted now and again by light crashes.

«Can you hear that?» says Jesus. «The river is close at hand.»

«But we will not arrive at the ford before night. It will soon be dark.»

«We will sleep in a hut somewhere. And we will cross the river tomorrow. I would have liked to arrive there earlier, because the flood is increasing hourly. Listen! The reeds on the banks are breaking under the pressure of the swollen water.»

«They kept You so long in those villages of the Decapolis! We said to the sick

people: “The next time!” but...»

«Who is ill, Wants to be cured, John. And he who pities them, cures them at once, John. It does not matter. We will cross over just the same. I want to do the other side before going back to Jerusalem for Pentecost.»

They become silent once again. It gets dark very quickly, as is usual on wet days. It becomes more and more difficult to walk in the deepening twilight. The trees along the road also increase the darkness with their foliage.

«Let us cross to the other side of the road. We are now very close to the ford. We will look for a hut.»

They cross over and are followed by the others. They cross a little muddy ditch, with more mud than water, which flows gurgling towards the river. They almost grope their way among the trees, making for the river, the noise of which is becoming louder and louder.

A first moonbeam pierces the clouds, it penetrates between two clouds and descends making the miry water of the Jordan shine, in a spot where the river is swollen and very wide. (If my reckoning is correct, the river is about fifty/sixty metres wide. I am a silly goose with regard to measurements, but I think that my house could have gone into that river-bed nine or ten times and it was about five and a half metres wide). It is no longer the beautiful calm blue Jordan, the quiet low water of which leaves uncovered the fine sand on the banks, where the reef-thickets begin to grow and rustle continuously. The water has now submersed everything and the first reef-thickets have been bent and broken and thus are not visible, with the exception of an odd leaf that undulates on the surface of the water and seems to be waving goodbye or imploring help. The water has already reached the foot of the first large trees. I do not know what trees they are. They are tall and leafy, as compact as a wall and dark in the dark night. Some willows dip the top of their withered foliage into the yellowish water.

«It is not possible to wade here» says Peter. «Not here. But it is possible over there. See? They are still wading» says Andrew.

In fact two quadrupeds are cautiously crossing the river. The water reaches up to the stomachs of the animals.

«If they can pass, so can boats.»

«However, it is better to cross over at once, even if it is dark. The clouds have

thinned out and it is moonlight. Do not let us miss this opportunity. Let us look for a boat...» And Peter utters three times a long moaning cry: «Hey!»

There is no reply.

«Let us go down, right down to the ford. Melkiah and his sons must be there. This is his best season. He will take us across.»

They walk as fast as they can on the little path along the river, which almost laps on it.

«But is that not a woman?» says Jesus looking at the two people who have already crossed the river on horseback and are now standing on the path.

«A woman?» Peter and the others cannot see or tell whether the person in dark clothes, who has dismounted and is now waiting, is a man or a woman.

«Yes. It is a woman. It's... Mary. Look now that she in the moonbeam.»

«You are lucky that you can see. Blessed be your eyes!»

«It is Mary. What will she be wanting?» and Jesus shouts: «Mary!»

«Rabboni! Is it You? Praised be God that I have found You!» and Mary runs as fast as a gazelle towards Jesus. I do not know how she does not stumble on the uneven road. She drops her heavy mantle and is now coming forward with her veil and light mantle held tight against her dark dress.

When she reaches Jesus she drops at His feet without worrying about the mud. She is panting, but happy. She repeats: «Glory be to God Who made me find You!»

«Why, Mary? What is happening? Were you not at Bethany?»

«I was at Bethany with Your Mother and the women, as You told us... But I came to meet You... Lazarus was not able to come, because he is suffering too much... So I came with a servant...»

«You are about, all alone, with a boy and in this weather?»

«Oh! Rabboni! You are not going to tell me that You think that I was afraid. I was not afraid to do so much evil... I am not afraid now to do something good.»

«So? Why did you come?»

«To tell You not to cross over... They are waiting for You on the other side to

injure You... I found out... I was told by one of the Herodians who once... who once loved me... Whether he told me out of love, still, or out of hatred, I do not know... I know that the other day he saw me through the gate and he said to me: “You silly Mary, are you waiting for your Master? You are doing the right thing, because it will be the last time, in fact as soon as He crosses the river and comes into Judaea, He will be captured. Look at Him carefully and then run away because it is not wise to be near Him, now... Then... You can imagine how anxiously... I inquired... You know... I know many people... and even if they say that I am mad or possessed... they still speak to me... And I found out that it is true. Then I took two horses and I came, without saying anything to Your Mother, not to worry Her... Go back at once, Master. If they find out that You are here, beyond the Jordan, they will come here. Herod also is looking for You... and You are too close to Machaerus now. Go away, for pity's sake, Master!...»

«Do not weep, Mary...»

«I am afraid, Master!»

«What! You afraid? No, you have been so brave as to cross the river in flood by night!...»

«But that is a river, whereas those are men and they are Your enemies and they hate You... I am afraid of their hatred for You... Because I love You, Master.»

«Do not be afraid. They will not get Me as yet. It is not My hour. Even if they placed many formations of soldiers along all the roads, they would not capture Me. It is not My hour. But I will do as you wish. I will go back...»

Judas grumbles something between his teeth and Jesus replies: «Yes, Judas. Exactly as you say. But just in the first part of your sentence. I am listening to her, of course I am. But not because she is a woman, as you are insinuating, but because she is the one who has made most progress in love. Mary, go home, while you can. I will go back and cross over... wherever I can, and I will go to Galilee. Come with My Mother and the other women to Cana, to Susanna's house. I will tell you there what there is to be done. Go in peace and may you be blessed. God is with you.»

Jesus lays His hand on her head, blessing her. Mary takes Jesus' hands, kisses them, stands up and then goes back. Jesus watches her go away. He sees her pick her heavy mantle and put it on; she then reaches her horse, mounts it and

goes to the ford and crosses over.

«And now let us go» He says. «I wanted to let you rest, but I cannot. I have your safety at heart, although Judas thinks otherwise. And believe Me, if you should fall into the hands of My enemies, that would do your health more harm than water and mud...»

They all lower their heads as they understand the implied reproach given in reply to their previous conversation.

They walk all night in changeable weather, in fitful showers. At a lurid dawn they find themselves near a very poor village, the muddy houses of which are lying close to the river. The river is a little narrower than at the ford. Some boats have been beached as far as the houses to protect them from the flood.

Peter utters his cry: «Hey!»

A vigorous elderly man comes out of a hovel. «What do you want?»

«Boats to cross over.»

«Impossible The flood is too dangerous... The current...»

«Hey you! Are you telling me? I am a fisherman from Galilee.»

«The sea is one thing... but this is a river... I do not want to lose my boat. In any case... I have but one and you are many.»

«You liar! Are you telling me that you have one boat only?»

«May I go blind, if I am lying, I... »

«Watch that you may really go blind. This is the Rabbi from Galilee Who gives sight to blind people and Who can satisfy you by making you go blind...»

«Oh! Mercy! The Rabbi! Forgive me, Rabboni!»

«Yes, I do. But you should never tell lies. God loves sincere people. Why say that you have but one boat when the whole village can give you the lie? To lie and to be found out is too severe a humiliation for man! Will you give Me your boats?»

«All of them, Master.»

«How many do we need, Peter?»

«In normal conditions two would be enough. But with the river in flood it is more difficult to manoeuvre them and we need three.»

«Take them, fisherman. But how will I get them back?»

«Come in one of them. Have you no sons?»

«I have one son, two sons-in-law and some grandchildren.»

«Two in each boat are enough to bring them back.»

«Let us go.»

The man calls the others and with the help of Peter, Andrew James and John they push the boats into the water. The current is strong and threatens to drag them away. The ropes holding them to the closest tree-trunks are as taut as bows and creak under the stress. Peter looks. He looks at the boats, at the river and shakes his head, he ruffles his grey hair with one hand and casts an inquisitive glance at Jesus.

«Are you afraid, Peter?»

«Well!... almost...»

«Be not afraid. Have faith. And you, too, man. He who carries God and His messengers must not be afraid. Let us get into the boats. I will go into the first one.»

The owner of the boats makes a gesture of resignation. He must be thinking that his relatives' last hour or his has come. He must at least be afraid of losing his boats or ending no one knows where.

Jesus is already in the boat. He is standing in the bow. All the others embark, some in the same boat, some in the other two. Only an old man remains on the embankment, a servant perhaps, watching the ropes.

«Are we all on board?»

«Yes, we are.»

«Are the oars ready?»

«They are.»

«Let go, you, on the bank.»

The old man untwists the ropes off the wooden pin which held them in a knot on a tree-trunk. As soon as the boats are free, they list for a moment southwards

towards the centre of the current.

But the power of miracle shines on Jesus' face. What He says to the river I do not know. I know that the current almost stops. The Jordan flows slowly as when it is not in spate. The boats cut across the water without any difficulty, nay, they are so fast that their owner is amazed.

They are now on the other side. They disembark with ease and the current does not threaten to drag the boats away even when the oars are still.

«Master, I see that You are really powerful» says the owner of the boats. «Bless Your servant and remember me, a sinner.»

«Why powerful?»

«Ehi! That was no trifle! You stopped the current of the Jordan in flood!...»

«Joshua had already worked that miracle, and it was even greater, because the water of the river disappeared to let the Ark pass...»

«And You, man, have carried across the true Ark of God» says, Judas with self-sufficiency.

«Most High God! Yes, I do believe it! You are the true Messiah! The Son of the Most High God. Oh! I will tell the towns and villages along the river what You did and what I saw! Come back, Master! There are many sick people in my poor village. Come and cure them!»

«I will come. In the meantime preach in My Name faith and holiness to be acceptable to God. Goodbye, man. Go in peace. And be not afraid about your return.»

«I am not afraid. If I were afraid I would ask You to have mercy on my life. But I believe in You and in your goodness and I am going away without asking for anything. Goodbye.»

He gets into his boat, he stands off and departs. He is sure of himself and soon reaches the other bank.

Jesus, Who has remained still until He sees him on the other bank, makes a gesture of blessing. He then withdraws towards the road.

The river resumes its vorticoso flowing... And it all ends thus.

361. On the Other Bank. Jesus Meets His Mother and the Women Disciples.

16th December 1945.

They are now on the other side of the Jordan and they are walking fast southwestwards, towards a second chain of hills, higher than the first one, beyond which is the Jordan plain. I gather from their conversation that they came away from the plain to avoid the mud that they left on the other side and they are thinking of going to their destination along internal routes, which are better kept and more practicable, for walking, particularly in wet weather.

«Whereabouts are we?» asks Matthew who finds his bearings with difficulty.

«We are certainly between Shiloh and Bethel. I recognise the mountains» says Thomas. «We passed here not long ago with Judas, who was the guest of a Pharisee at Bethel.»

«You could have been his guest, too, but you would not come. Neither he nor I said to you: “Do not come.”»

«I am not saying that you did say so. I am only saying that I preferred to stay with the disciples who were evangelizing here.»

And the argument is over. Andrew in fact is glad and says: «If there are friendly Pharisees in Bethel, we shall not be attacked.»

«But we are going in the other direction, not to Jerusalem» they point out to him. «We shall have to go there for Passover in any case! I don't know how we shall manage...»

«Of course! Why did He say that He is going back to Cana? The women could have come back and we could have made our pilgrimage...»

«It is my wife's destiny that she should not spend Passover in Jerusalem!» exclaims Peter.

John asks Jesus Who is talking animatedly to the Zealot: «Master, how shall we manage to go and come back in time?»

«I do not know. I trust in God. If we are late, it will not be My fault.»

«You were right in being prudent» says the Zealot.

«Oh! As far as I am concerned, I would have gone on. Because it is not yet My hour. I can feel that. But how would you all have put up with the adventure, considering that for some time you have been so... tired?»

«Master... You are right. A demon seems to have been blowing poison among us. We have changed so much!»

«Man does get tired. He wants things quickly. And he dreams of silly things. When he realises that his dreams are different from reality, he becomes upset and, if he is not of good will, he surrenders. He does not remember that the Almighty, Who could have made the Universe out of Chaos in a moment, made it in orderly separate stages in periods of time called days. From the spiritual Chaos of the whole world I have to make the Kingdom of God. And I will do so. I will build its foundations, I am now building them, and I have to split a very hard rock to lay the foundations that will not collapse. You will slowly build the walls. Your successors will continue the work, both in height and in width. As I shall die in the work, so will you and there will be many more who will die with or without bloodshed, consumed by this work for which spirit of sacrifice and generosity, tears, blood and endless patience are required...»

Peter thrusts his grey-haired head between Jesus and John: «Do you mind telling me what you are saying?»

«Oh! Simon! Come here. We were talking of the future Church. I was explaining that, contrary to your hurry, your tiredness, your discouragement and so forth, it exacts calm, perseverance, exertion and trust. I was saying that *the sacrifice of each of its members is required. Starting with Me, the Founder.* I am, in fact, its mystical Head, for you, for all the disciples, for all those who will be called Christians and will belong to the universal Church. And really in the great classification of the hierarchy *the most humble people, who seem to be simple "numbers", will be the ones who will make the Church truly vital.* In actual fact I will often have to seek refuge in them, to continue to keep alive the faith and the strength of the continuously renewed apostolic colleges, and I will have to allow those apostles to be tortured by Satan and by envious, proud, incredulous men. And their moral martyrdom will not be less painful than a material one, as *they will find themselves between the active will of God and the wicked will of man, who will act as an instrument of Satan and by every means and effort will endeavour to make them appear as mendacious, mad, possessed*

persons, in order to paralyze My work in them and the fruits of My work, which are as many victorious blows against the Beast.»

«And will they resist?»

«*They will resist, even if I am not physically with them.* They will have to believe not only what is their duty to believe, but also in their secret mission, and they will have to believe *that it is holy and useful, and that it originated from Me,* while Satan will hiss around them to terrorise them and the world will shout to deride them and the not always perfectly bright ministers of God to condemn them. *That is the destiny of My future voices.* And yet I will have no other means to rouse men and bring them back to the Gospel and to the Christ! But for everything I have asked of them and imposed on them and received from them, oh! I will grant them eternal joy, a special glory. *In Heaven there is a closed book. God only can read it. All the truth is contained in it.* But God at times removes the seals and revives the truth already revealed to men, selecting a man, chosen for that destiny, to know past, present and future, as contained in that mysterious book. Have you ever seen a son, the best in the family, or a schoolboy, the most clever at school, being called by his father or teacher to read a book for adults and have it explained to him? He stands beside his father or teacher, embraced by one of their arms, while the other hand of the father or teacher points at the lines which he wants to be read and understood by his dearest child. God behaves likewise with those consecrated to such destiny. He draws them to Himself and holds them with His arm and forces them to read what He wants, and to understand the meaning and to repeat it later and suffer derision and grief because of it. *I, the Man, am the Founder of the family of those who speak the Truth of the heavenly book, and I therefore suffer mockery, grief and death.* But the Father is already preparing My Glory. And once I have risen to it, *I will prepare the glory of those whom I compelled to read in the closed book that which I wanted,* and in the presence of the whole risen Mankind and of the angelical choruses I will point them out for what they were, calling them beside Me while I open the seals of the Book, which it will no longer be necessary to keep closed, and they will smile seeing and reading once again the words that were clarified to them when they suffered on the earth.»

«And what about the others?» asks John who has paid great attention to the lesson.

«Which others?»

«The others, who like me have not read that book on the earth, will they never know what it says?»

«Everything will be known to the blessed souls in Heaven. Being engrossed in the Infinite Wisdom, they will know.»

«Immediately As soon as they die?»

«As soon as they enter Life.»

«Why then on the Last Day You will let everybody see that You call them to know the Book?»

«Because not only the blessed souls will be there to see that. All Mankind will be there. And on the side of the damned souls there will be many who laughed at the voices of God, as if they were the voices of mad or possessed people and tormented them because of their gift. It will be a long expected but fair revenge granted to those martyrs of the dull wickedness of the world.»

«How beautiful it will be to see all that!» exclaims John enraptured.

«Yes. And to see all the Pharisees grind their teeth, seized with anger» says Peter rubbing his hands.

«Oh! I think I will look only at Jesus and the blessed souls reading the Book with Him...» replies John, dreaming of that hour, while his light-blue eyes, lost in I wonder what vision of light, are made brighter by emotional tears, which have welled in them, and an innocent smile appears on his red lips.

The Zealot looks at him; Jesus also looks at him. But Jesus does not say anything. The Zealot instead says: «You will look at yourself, then! Because if among us there is one who will be the “voice of God” on the earth and will be elected to read the passages of the sealed Book, you are that one, John, the favourite disciple of Jesus and the friend of God.»

«Oh! Do not say that! I am the most ignorant among you. And if Jesus did not say that the Kingdom of God belongs to children, I would think that I could never enter it, as I am good for nothing. Is that right, Master, that my only merit is that I am like a child?»

«Yes, you belong to blessed childhood. And may you be blessed because of that!»

They continue to walk for some time, then Peter, who looks back along the track

on which they are, exclaims: «Merciful Providence! That is the women's wagon!»

They all turn round. It is in fact Johanna's heavy wagon that is coming forward drawn by two strong horses. They stop waiting for it. As the leather tilt is completely lowered, it is not possible to see who is in the wagon. Jesus beckons to the driver to stop and the man utters an exclamation of joy when he sees Jesus standing on the edge of the road with His arm raised.

While the man stops the two panting horses, the lean face of Isaac appears through an opening in the tilt: «The Master!» he shouts. «Mother, rejoice! He is here!»

One can hear voices of women and shuffling of feet in the wagon, but before one of them gets off, Manaen, Marjiam and Isaac have jumped down and are worshipping the Master.

«Are you still here, Manaen?»

«I have remained faithful to orders, particularly now, as the women are afraid... But... We obeyed, because it is our duty to obey, but I can assure You that there was nothing to worry about. I know for certain that Pilate has called riotous fellows to order, stating that anyone giving rise to rebellions during the feast days would be severely punished. I think that Pilate's wife and above all her lady friends are connected with such protection. At the Court we know everything and nothing. But we know enough...» and Manaen moves to one side to make room for Mary, Who has got off the wagon and has walked a few steps towards them, and is clearly very anxious and deeply moved.

They kiss each other while all the women disciples worship the Master. Neither Mary nor Martha of Lazarus are there.

Mary whispers: «How much anguish since that evening! How everybody hates You, Son!» and tears stream down the red lines left on Her face by the many tears shed during the previous days.

«But You can see that the Father sees to everything. So do not weep! I defy all the hatred of the world bravely. But one tear of Yours depresses Me. Cheer up, Holy Mother!» and embracing Her with one arm, He turns round to greet the women disciples, and particularly Johanna, who came back to accompany Mary.

«Oh! Master! There is no difficulty in staying with Your Mother. Mary was held

up in Bethany because her brother is suffering so much. So I came. I left the children with the wife of the guardian of the mansion, as she is kind and motherly. But there is also Chuza to look after them, so You can imagine whether Matthias, who is my husband's pet, will lack anything! But Chuza also told me that it was not necessary to leave. The Proconsul's warning has caused Herodias also to draw her claws in. The Tetrarch, too, is trembling with fear and he is worried about one thing only: that Herodias may ruin him in the eyes of Rome. The death of John has destroyed many situations that were favourable to Herodias. And Herod is fully aware that the people are against him because of John's murder. The old fox realises that the worst punishment for him would be to lose the hateful illusory protection of Rome. The people would attack him at once. So do not worry! He will do nothing on his own initiative!»

«In that case, let us go back to Jerusalem! You can proceed without any fear about your safety. Let us go. Let the women get into the wagon again, and Matthew and whoever is tired will go with them. We will rest at Bethel. Let us go.»

The women obey. Matthew and Bartholomew go with them, The others prefer to follow the wagon on foot together with Manaen, Isaac and Marjiam. And Manaen tells them how he inquired to find out how much truth there was in the boasting of the Herodian who had caused so much anxiety in the peaceful gathering at Bethany, near Lazarus «who was suffering so much» says Manaen.

«Did a woman come to Bethany?»

«No, Lord. But we have been away three days. Who is she?»

«A disciple. I will give her to Eliza because she is young, alone and without means.»

«Eliza is in Johanna's mansion. She wanted to come. But she has a bad cold. She was dying to see You. She used to say: “But do you not understand that the sight of Him gives me peace?”»

«I will give her also joy through this young woman. And what about you, Marjiam.? Are you not saying anything?»

«I am listening, Master.»

«The boy listens and writes. He makes this one and that one repeat Your words and he writes them. But have we repeated them correctly?» says Isaac.

«I will examine the work of My disciple and add anything which should be missing» says Jesus caressing the bronzed cheek of Marjiam. And He asks: «And what about your old father? Have you seen him?»

«Oh! yes! He did not recognise me. He wept for joy. But we shall see him at the Temple, because Ishmael is sending them. He has even given them more days this year. He is afraid of You.»

«I should think so! After what happened to Hananiah in the month of Shebat!» says Peter laughing.

«But the fear of God does not build, it demolishes. It is not friendship. It is only expectation that often changes into hatred. But everybody gives what one can...»

They go on their way and I lose sight of them.

362. At Thomas' Home In Ramah. The Number of the Elect.

17th December 1945.

Thomas, who was at the rear of the group speaking to Manaen and Bartholomew, leaves his companions and catches up with the Master, Who is in front with Marjiam and Isaac. «Master, we shall soon be near Ramah. Would You come and bless my sister's baby? She is so anxious to see You! We could stop there. There is room for everybody. Make me happy, Lord!»

«I will, and with great joy! We shall enter Jerusalem tomorrow and we shall be well rested.»

«Oh! I will go ahead and warn them! May I go?»

«Yes, go. But remember that I am not a worldly friend. Do not compel your relatives to spend a lot of money. Treat Me as a “Master”. Is that clear?»

«Yes, my Lord, it is. I will tell my relatives. Are you coming with me, Marjiam?»

«If Jesus will allow me...»

«You may go, son.»

The others, who have seen Thomas and Marjiam go towards Ramah, situated on the left hand side of the road, which, I think, takes one from Samaria to Jerusalem, quicken their paces to find out what is happening.

«We are going to the house of Tom's sister. I have stayed in all the houses of your relatives. It is fair that I should go to his as well. And that is why I sent him ahead.»

«Well, if You do not mind, I will go away, too. I want to see whether there is anything new. If there is bad news, I will be at the Damascus Gate when You arrive there. Otherwise I will meet You... Where, Lord?» says Manaen.

«At Bethany, Manaen. I am going to Lazarus' house at once. But I am leaving the women in Jerusalem. I will be going alone. Nay, I would ask you to escort the women to their houses after today's rest.»

«As You wish, Lord.»

«Tell the driver to follow us to Ramah.»

In fact the wagon is coming up slowly behind the apostolic group. Isaac and the Zealot stop waiting for it, while all the others take the side road, which with a good gradient leads to the very low little hill on which Ramah is built.

Thomas, who is beside himself with joy and looks even more rubicund as his face is so bright, is waiting at the entrance of the village. He runs to meet Jesus: «How happy we are, Master! All the family is here! My father who was so anxious to see You, my mother, my brothers!... How happy I am!» And he walks beside Jesus strutting through the village like a conqueror in triumph.

The house of Thomas' sister is at a cross-roads on the eastern side of the town. It is the typical house of a well to do Israelite, with very few windows, with an iron door with judas-hole, a terraced roof and high dark walls enclosing the garden also at the rear of the house, with tall fruit trees standing above them.

Today the maidservant does not have to look through the peephole. The door is wide open and all the inhabitants of the house are lined up in the hall where the adults are busy holding back boys and girls, who, excited at the news, are restless and are continuously rushing to the front, thus infringing the hierarchical order, as the first row, the place of honour, is for Thomas' parents, his sister and her husband.

But when Jesus appears at the door, no one can hold the children back. They are like a brood of chickens coming out of their nest after a night's rest. And Jesus receives the impact of the kind garrulous group who clash against His knees and press Him, raising their little faces to be kissed, and will not move away notwithstanding the fact that their fathers and mothers call them and Tom gives a few slaps to restore order.

«Leave them! Leave them alone! I wish the whole world were like that!» exclaims Jesus Who has stooped to please all the children.

At last He can go in and is welcomed by the more respectful greetings of the adults. What I particularly like is the greeting of Thomas' father, a typical elderly Jew, who is raised from his knees by Jesus, Who wants to kiss him «out of gratitude for his generosity in giving Him an apostle».

«Oh! God has loved me more than He loved anybody else in Israel, because while every Jew has one son, the first-born, consecrated to the Lord, I have two: the first and the last one; and the last one is even more sacred, because, although he is neither a Levite nor a Priest, he does what not even the High Priest does: he constantly sees God and receives His commands!» he says in the trembling voice of elderly people, made even more trembling by emotion. And he concludes: «Tell me one thing only to make my soul happy. Since You do not lie, tell me: this son of mine, by the way he follows You, is he worthy of serving You and deserving eternal Life?»

«You may rest in peace, father. Your Tom has a great position in the heart of God because of his behaviour, and he will have a great place in Heaven because of the way he will serve God till he breathes his last.»

Thomas gasps for air like a fish out of water, deeply moved by what he has heard. The old man raises his trembling hands, while tears stream down the deep wrinkles of his face and disappear in his patriarchal beard, and he says: «May the blessing of Jacob descend upon you; the blessing of the patriarch upon the just one among his sons: may the Almighty bless you with the blessings of Heaven above, blessings of the deep lying below, blessings of breasts and womb. May the blessings of your father exceed those of his ancestors and until the desire of the eternal hills comes, may they rest upon the head of Thomas, upon the head of him who is nazirite among his brothers!»

And they all reply: «Amen.»

«And now, my Lord, will You please bless this house and above all these little ones who are blood of my blood» says the old man pointing at the children.

And Jesus, stretching His arms out, says the Mosaic blessing in a loud voice and He adds: «May God, in Whose presence your ancestors walked, God Who has nourished Me since My childhood to the present day, may the angel who has delivered Me from all evil, bless these children; may they be named after Me and after My ancestors and may they multiply copiously upon the earth» and He ends by taking the last born from his mother's arms to kiss his forehead saying: «And may the chosen virtues that dwelt in the just Man, after whom you have been named, descend upon you like butter and honey, making your name worthy of Heaven and adorned like a palm-tree laden with golden dates and a cedar covered with royal leaves.»

Everybody is moved and enraptured. Then they all utter a cry of joy while Jesus enters the house and they stop only when He is in the yard, where He introduces His Mother, the women disciples, the apostles and the disciples.

It is no longer morning, neither is it noon. The weak ray of sunlight which pierces with difficulty the ruffled clouds while the weather is still so unsettled, makes me understand that the sun is about to set and that twilight is approaching.

The women are no longer here. Neither are Isaac and Manaen. Marjiam instead is with Jesus, and is so happy to be with Him, while He goes out with the apostles and all the male relatives of Thomas to see some vineyards, which appear to be of a special quality. Both the old man and Thomas' brother-in-law enlarge upon the position of the vineyard and the rarity of the vines, which at present have but a few tender leaves.

Jesus listens kindly to the explanations showing an interest in pruning and hoeing, as if they were the most useful things on the earth. At the end He says to Thomas smiling: «Shall I bless this dowry of your twin sister?»

«Oh! My Lord! I am neither Doras nor Ishmael. I know that Your very breath, Your presence in a place is already a blessing. But if You wish to raise Your hand on these plants, please do so, and their fruit will certainly be holy.»

«And will it not be plentiful? What do you say, father?»

«Holy... is enough. And I will press the grapes and will send You the wine for

next Passover, so that You may use it in the ritual chalice.»

«Very well. I will look forward to that. At next Passover I want to use the wine of a true Israelite.»

They leave the vineyard to go back to the village.

The news of the presence of Jesus of Nazareth in the village has spread and the people of Ramah are all in the streets and are anxious to approach Him.

Jesus notices it and says to Thomas: «Why do they not come? Are they perhaps afraid of Me? Tell them that I love them.»

Oh! Thomas does not wait to be told twice! He goes from one group to another so quickly that he looks like a large butterfly fluttering from flower to flower. And those who hear the invitation do not wait to be told twice either. They all run, passing the word round, and gather round Jesus, so that when they arrive at the cross-roads, where Thomas' house is, there is quite a large crowd speaking respectfully to the apostles and Thomas' relatives, asking various questions.

I realise that Thomas has worked hard during the winter months and much of the Gospel is already known in the village. But they wish to have detailed elucidations and one who has been deeply affected by the blessing given by Jesus to the little ones of the hospitable house and by what the Master said of Thomas, asks: «Will they thus all be just, because of Your blessing?»

«Not because of it, but because of their actions. I gave them the strength of My blessing to strengthen them in their actions. But it is for them to perform deeds and only good deeds to attain Heaven. I bless everybody... but not everybody in Israel will be saved.»

«On the contrary, only very few will be saved, if they continue to behave as they are behaving now» grumbles Thomas.

«What are you saying?»

«The truth. Those who persecute the Christ and calumniate Him, those who do not practise what He teaches, will have no part in His Kingdom» says Thomas in his deep voice.

One pulls him by the sleeve asking: «Is He very severe?» pointing at Jesus.

«No, He is not. Nay, He is too good.»

«What do you think, shall I be saved? I am not one of the disciples. But you know what I am like and that I always believed what you said. But I do not know what I should do, in addition to that. What should I do exactly to be saved, besides what I already do?»

«Ask Him. His judgement will be more truthful and kind than mine.»

The man comes forward. He says: «Master, I comply with the Law, and since Thomas repeated Your words to me, I try to comply more and more. But I am not very generous. I do what I must do. I refrain from doing what it is not right to do, because I am afraid of Hell. But I am very fond of a comfortable life and, I admit it, I endeavour to do things in such a way that while I do not commit sin, I do not trouble myself too much either. Shall I be saved by behaving so?»

«You will. But why be avaricious with good God Who is so generous with you? Why do you expect only to be saved, and with some difficulty, and you do not wish to attain great holiness, which gives eternal peace at once? Come on, man! Be generous with your soul!»

The man says humbly: «I will think about it, my Lord. I feel that you are right and that I am wronging my soul by compelling it to go through a long purification period before having peace.»

«Very well. Your thought is already the beginning of perfecting.»

Another man from Ramah asks: «Lord, are only few people saved?»

«If man knew how to behave with respect towards himself and with reverential love towards God, all men would be saved, as God desires. But man does not behave thus. And like a fool, he plays with tinsel, instead of taking pure gold. Be generous in wishing Good. Does it pain you? *That is where is the merit.* Strive to go through the narrow door. The other one, which is wide and ornate, is an allurement of Satan to lead you astray. The gate of Heaven is narrow, low, barren and rough. In order to enter it one must be agile, light, without pomp and without materialism. *One must be spiritual to be able to do so.* Otherwise when the hour of your death comes, you will not be able to pass through it. And many will be really seen trying to pass through it without being successful, as they are so laden with materialism, so decked out with worldly pomp, so stiffened by the crust of sin, unable to stoop because of their pride, which acts as a skeleton. And the Landlord of the Kingdom will then come to close the gate, and those who are outside, those who have not been able to go in at the right time, will knock at

the door shouting: “Lord, open the gate to us. We are here as well.” But He will reply: “I really do not know you, neither do I know where you come from.” And they will say: “What? Do You not remember us? We ate and drank with You and we listened to You when You preached in our squares.” But He will reply: “I really do not know you. The more I look at you the more you seem to be sated with what I declared was impure food. The more I examine you, the more I see that you do not belong to My family. Now, I really see whose sons and subjects you are: the Other one's. Satan is your father, the Flesh your mother, Pride your nurse, Hatred your servant, sin is your treasure, vices your gems. *On your hearts there is written: 'Selfishness'.* Your hands are dirty with the robberies committed against your brothers. Away from here! Away from Me, all of you, operators of iniquity.” Then, while Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the prophets and the just of the Kingdom of God will come from the heights of Heaven shining with glory, *those who did not love but were selfish, who did not sacrifice themselves but lived in the lap of luxury,* will be driven away and confined to the place where there is eternal weeping and nothing but terror. And those who have risen gloriously and have come from east and west, from north and south, will gather round the nuptial table of the Lamb, the King of the Kingdom of God. And then one will see that many who appeared to be “the least” in the army of the earth, will be the first in the city of the Kingdom. And one will also see that not all the mighty ones in Israel are mighty in Heaven, and not all those chosen by the Christ to be His servants have deserved to be elected to the nuptial table. Instead one will see that many, who were considered to be “the first” will be not only the last, but not even the last. Because *many are called, but few are those who can turn their election into true glory.*»

While Jesus is speaking, some Pharisees arrive with a pilgrimage on its way to Jerusalem, or coming from Jerusalem looking for lodgings, the Holy City being overcrowded. They see the concourse of people and approach them to see. They soon see Jesus' fair-haired head shining against the dark wall of Thomas' house.

«Let us pass, because we want to speak to the Nazarene» they shout overbearingly.

The crowds open out with no enthusiasm and the apostles see the group of Pharisees come towards them.

«Peace to You, Master!»

«Peace to you. What do you want?»

«Are You going to Jerusalem?»

«Like every faithful Israelite.»

«Don't go! A serious danger threatens You there. We know because we have come from Jerusalem to meet our families. And we came to warn You because we heard that You were at Ramah.»

«Who told you, if you do not mind Me asking you?» asks Peter who has become suspicious and is ready to begin a discussion.

«It does not concern you, man. All you need know, since you call us snakes, is that there are many snakes near the Master and that you ought to mistrust the too many and too powerful disciples.»

«Hey! You are not insinuating that Manaen or...»

«Be silent, Peter. And you, Pharisee, you ought to know that no danger can dissuade a faithful believer from fulfilling his duty. *If one loses his life, it is nothing.* What is grave, is to lose one's soul by infringing the Law. But you know. And you know that I know. So why are you tempting Me? Do you perhaps not know that I am aware why you are doing it?»

«I am not tempting You. It is the truth. Many among us are hostile to You. But not everybody. We do not hate You. We know that Herod is looking for You and we say to You: go away. Go away from here, because if Herod captures You, he will certainly kill You. That is what he wants.»

«It is what he wants, but he will not do it. I know that for certain. In any case you may go and tell the old fox that He, Whom he is seeking, is in Jerusalem. In fact I come expelling demons and curing people, without hiding Myself. And I do and will do it today, tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, until My time is over. But I must proceed until I reach the end. And I must enter Jerusalem today and then once more, and once more and once more again, because it is not possible for Me to stop before. And it must be fulfilled with justice, that is, in Jerusalem.»

«The Baptist died elsewhere.»

«He died in holiness, and *holiness means: "Jerusalem."* If Jerusalem now means "Sin", that is only because of what is only earthly and will soon no longer be. But I am talking of what is eternal and spiritual, that is, of the Heavenly Jerusalem. All the just and the prophets die in it, in its holiness. And I will die in

it and in vain you are trying to lead Me into sin. And I will die also among the hills of Jerusalem but not by Herod's hand, but by the will of him who hates Me more subtly than Herod does, because he sees in Me the usurper of the longed for Priesthood and the Purifier of Israel from all the infectious diseases polluting it. So do not throw on Herod all the eagerness to kill, but each of you should take his share, because, truly, the Lamb is on a mountain which wolves and jackals are climbing on every side to slaughter it and...»

The hailstorm of burning truth makes the Pharisees flee.

Jesus watches them run away. He then looks southwards, towards a clearer brightness, which perhaps indicates the area of Jerusalem and He sadly says: «Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you that kill your prophets and stone those who are sent to you, how often have I longed to gather your children, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you refused! So be it! Your House will be left to you devoid of its true Master. He will come, He will act, as prescribed by the rite, as the first and last son of Israel must act, and then He will go away. He will no longer stay within your walls to purify you by means of His presence. And I assure you that you and your inhabitants will no longer see Me, in My true figure, till the time comes when you say: "Blessings on Him Who comes in the name of the Lord"... And you people of Ramah, remember these words and tell the others so that you may not be involved in the punishment of God. Be faithful... Go. Peace be with you.»

And Jesus withdraws to the house of Thomas with all his relatives and the apostles.

363. At the Temple. The "Our Father" and a Parable on True Sons.

1st January 1946, 6.35 a.m.

Jesus says:

«Get up, Mary. Let us sanctify the day with a page of the Gospel. Because My Word is sanctification. See, Mary. Because to see the days of Christ on the earth is sanctification. Write, Mary. Because to write about Christ is sanctification, because to repeat what Jesus says is sanctification, because to preach Jesus is sanctification, because to teach our brothers is sanctification. A great reward

will be given to you for that charity.»

Jesus has left Ramah (vision of 17th December 1945) and is already in sight of Jerusalem. He is proceeding, as He did last year, singing the prescribed psalms. Many of the people on the crowded road turn round to look at the apostolic group passing by. Some greet them reverently; some look only stealthily at them, smiling with respect, and they are mainly women; some watch them only; some smile ironically and contemptuously; lastly, some pass by haughtily and with evident ill-will. Jesus is walking tranquilly in His best clothes. Like everybody else He has changed in order to enter the holy city decently, and I would say, elegantly dressed.

Marjiam also is equal to the situation in his new garments this year and he is walking beside Jesus, singing at the top of his voice, which, in actual fact, is somewhat harsh, as it is not yet manly. But his imperfect tone is lost in the full chorus of his companions' voices and it emerges as clear as silvery trilling only in the top notes, which he still sings in a steady boy's voice. And he is happy...

During a pause in singing, while they are already in sight of the Damascus Gate – that is where they are entering to go straight to the Temple – they stop to let an impressive caravan pass, as it takes up the whole road obstructing the traffic. While wise people stop at the roadside, Marjiam asks: «My Lord, will You tell me another beautiful parable for Your son who is so far away? I would like to add it to those I have already written, because I am sure that at Bethany we shall meet his messengers and have his news. And I am dying to give him a joy, which I promised him and which both his heart and mine desire...»

«Yes, My son. I will certainly tell you one.»

«One that will really comfort him, that will make him understand that he is still Your beloved...»

«I will do that. And I will rejoice, too, because it will be the truth.»

«When will You tell it, Lord?»

«Very soon. We will go straight to the Temple, as is our duty, and I will speak there before they prevent Me from doing so.»

«And will You speak for him?»

«Yes, son.»

«Thank You, Lord! It must be so painful to be separated thus...» says Marjiam, whose dark eyes begin to shine with tears.

Jesus lays a hand on his head and He turns round to beckon to the Twelve to approach Him and set out again. The Twelve, in fact, had stopped to listen to some people, I do not know whether they believe in the Master or are anxious to know Him, and they had stopped for the same reason that had compelled Jesus and His apostles to stop on the roadside.

«We are coming, Master. We were listening to those people among whom there are some proselytes who have come from far, and they were asking us where they could meet You» says Peter moving towards Him.

«Why do they want to meet Me?»

And Peter, now beside Jesus Who has set out again, says: «They want to hear You speak and to be cured from some diseases. See that tilted cart, behind them? There are some proselytes from the Diaspora in it, who have come by sea or from distant countries, urged to make this pilgrimage by their faith in You, besides their respect for the Law. Some are from Ephesus, some from Perga, some from Iconium and there is a poor fellow from Philadelphia, whom they, being mostly rich merchants, have received in their cart out of pity, hoping thus to gain the Lord's favour.»

«Marjiam, go and tell them to follow Me to the Temple. And they will have both health for their souls through My word and health to their bodies, if they can have faith.»

The boy goes away quickly. But the Twelve raise a chorus of disapproval because of the «imprudence» of Jesus, Who wants to make Himself conspicuous in the Temple...

«We are going there specially to show them that I am not afraid. To prove to them that no threat can make Me infringe the precept. Have you not understood their trick yet? All their threats, all their apparently friendly advice aim only at making Me commit sin, so that they may have a real charge against Me. Do not be cowardly. Have faith. My hour has not come.»

«But why do You not go and reassure Your Mother first? She is waiting for You...» says Judas Iscariot.

«No. I am going to the Temple first, which, until the moment prearranged by the

Eternal Father for the new era, is the House of God. My Mother will suffer less waiting for Me than She would, knowing that I am preaching in the Temple. And I thus honour My Father and Mother, by devoting my very first hour in Jerusalem to the Former, and by granting tranquillity to the Latter. Let us go and be not afraid. Those who are afraid may go to Gethsemane and brood over their fear among the women.»

The apostles, reprimanded by this last remark, no longer speak. They line up, in threes except in the front line, where Jesus is, where they are four, and when Marjiam arrives they are five, and in fact Thaddeus and the Zealot place themselves behind Jesus, leaving Him in the middle between Peter and Marjiam.

At the Damascus Gate they see Manaen. «Lord, I thought it was better for me to come and remove every doubt about the situation. I can assure You that there is no danger for You, except the ill-will of the Pharisees and scribes. You can go without any fear.»

«I knew, Manaen. But I am grateful to you. Come to the Temple with Me. If it is no burden to you...»

«Burden? I would defy the whole world on Your behalf! I Would do anything!»

The Iscariot mumbles something.

Manaen turns round resentfully. He says in a firm voice: «No, man, those are not just "words". I ask the Master to prove my sincerity.»

«There is no need, Manaen. Let us go.»

They proceed among the obstructing crowds and when they arrive at the house of some friends, they get rid of their sacks, which James, John and Andrew leave on behalf of everybody in a long dark hall, and then join their companions.

They enter the enclosure of the Temple passing through the Antonia. The Roman soldiers are watching, but they do not move. They talk in low voices among themselves. Jesus looks to see whether there is anyone He knows. But He does not see Quintillian or Alexander, the soldier.

They are now in the Temple, in the not very sacred swarm of the first yards, where are merchants and money-changers. Jesus looks and quivers with indignation. He turns pale and walks so stately that He seems to be taller in stature.

The Iscariot tempts Him: «Why do You not repeat the holy gesture? See? They have forgotten... and there is desecration once again in the House of God. Do You not grieve at that? Are You not rising against them?» Judas' dark handsome face, which is ironical and false notwithstanding every effort he makes to avoid it appearing so, is even vulpine, as he says those words, bending a little, as if he were paying respectful homage, looking Him up and down.

«It is not the hour. But all that will be purified. And forever!...» says Jesus resolutely.

Judas smiles a little and comments: «The "forever" of men!! It's very precarious, Master! You can see!...»

Jesus does not reply to him, intent as He is on greeting from afar Joseph of Arimathea, who is passing by enveloped in pompous robes, followed by other people.

They say the ritual prayers and then go back to the Court of the Gentiles, under the porches of which many people have gathered.

The proselytes, previously met in the street, have followed Jesus all the time. They have taken the sick people with them and have now laid them in the shade of the porches, near Jesus. Their women, who have been waiting for them here, now come slowly close. They are all veiled. But one is already sat, probably because she is ill, and her companions take her near the other sick people. More people crowd round Jesus. I can see that there is astonishment and confusion among the groups of rabbis and priests because of the open arrival and preaching of Jesus.

«Peace be with you, with each of you listening to Me! Holy Passover brings the faithful children back to the House of the Father. This blessed Passover of ours is like a mother who is thoughtful of the welfare of her children and calls them at the top of her voice, that they may come from everywhere leaving all matters pending for a greater matter. *The only great and important one: to honour the Lord and Father. From that we understand that we are brothers, and the command and care to love our neighbour as ourselves derive also from that, through kind witness.* Have we never met before? Did we not know each other? We did not. But if we are here, because we are the children of One Father Who wants us in His House for the Passover Banquet, then, we feel, if not with our material senses, but certainly with our superior part, that we are all equal, all brothers, who have come from One only, and thus we love one another, as if we

had been brought up together. And our union of love is an anticipation of the other more perfect one that we will enjoy in the Kingdom of Heaven, under the eyes of God, all embraced by His Love. *I, Son of God and of Man, with you men, sons of God. I, the First-born, with you, brothers beloved beyond all human measure, to the extent that I became the Lamb for the sins of men.*

But while we are enjoying our brotherly union in the House of the Father, let us think of our brothers who are far away, but still our brothers: in the Lord or through their origin. Let them be in our hearts. Let us take our absent brothers in our hearts to the holy altar. Let us pray for them, gathering their remote voices in our spirits, together with their yearning to be here. And as we collect the conscious longing of remote Israelites, let us collect also the yearning of souls belonging to men, who are not aware of having a soul and of being the children of One Father only. All the souls in the world cry to the Most High from the prisons of their bodies. In dark prisons they moan towards the Light. Let us have mercy on them, since we are in the light of the true Faith.

Let us pray: *Our Father, Who are in Heaven, may Your Name be held holy by all mankind!* To know it is to set out towards holiness. Let Gentiles and heathens become aware of Your existence, o Holy Father, and let them come to You, Father, like the three wise men in days gone by but not inert, because nothing pertaining to the coming of the Redemption of the world is inert, let them come to You guided by the Star of Jacob, by the Morning Star, by the King and Redeemer of the stock of David, by Your Anointed Son, Who has already been offered and consecrated to be the Victim for the sins of the world.

Let Your Kingdom come to every place on the earth where You are known and loved, and where You are not yet known. And above all let it come to the three times sinners, who know You but do not love You in Your works and manifestations of Light, and endeavour to reject and suffocate the Light that came to the world, because they are souls of darkness, who prefer the works of darkness and they do not know that to suffocate the Light of the world is to offend You, because You are the Most Holy Light and the Father of all lights, beginning from the One that became Flesh and Word to bring Your Light to all men of good will.

May Your Will, Most Holy Father, be done by every heart in the world, that is, may every heart be saved, and let none be left without the fruit of the Sacrifice of the Great Victim, because that is Your Will: that man be saved and may enjoy You, Holy Father, after the forgiveness which is about to be granted.

Give us Your help, o Lord, all Your help. And give it to those who are awaiting it, to those who do not know that they are awaiting it, give it to sinners with repentance that saves, give it to heathens with the force of your rousing call, give it to unhappy people, to prisoners, to exiles, to those whose bodies or spirits are diseased, give it to everybody, as You are Everything, and the time of Mercy has come.

Forgive, o Good Father, the sins of Your children. Forgive the sins of Your people, which are the gravest, the sins of those who want to persist in error, whilst Your predilection love gave Light just to this people. And forgive those who are brutalised by corrupt paganism that teaches vice, and are drowned in the idolatry of such dull mephitic heathenism, whereas there are valuable souls among them, whom You love having created them. *We forgive, I am the first to forgive, so that You may forgive, and we implore Your protection over the weakness of men, that You may free Your creatures from the Principle of Evil, from whom all crimes, idolatries, sins, temptations and errors come. Free them, O Lord, from the dreadful Prince, so that they may come to Your eternal Light.»*

The crowd have followed this solemn prayer with great attention. Famous rabbis have also approached the group and among them there is Gamaliel, holding his bearded chin thoughtfully... A group of women has also come close to them, they are wearing mantles with a kind of hood that covers their faces. And the rabbis have moved away haughtily... Many faithful disciples have hastened there having heard that the Master had arrived; among them there are Hermas, Stephen, John the priest, then Nicodemus and Joseph, the inseparable two, and many friends of theirs, whom I think I have seen previously.

In the pause after the prayer of the Lord, Who becomes engrossed in thought, looking gravely austere, Joseph of Arimathea is heard saying: «Well, Gamaliel? Do you still not think that this is the word of the Lord?»

«Joseph, I was told: "These stones will shake at the sound of My words"» replies Gamaliel.

Stephen cries rashly: «Work the miracle, o Lord! Give the order, and they will tumble down! It would be a great gift, if the building collapsed and the walls of Your Faith rose in their hearts! Do that for my master!»

«Blasphemer!» shout an angry group of rabbis with some of their pupils.

«No» shouts in turn Gamaliel. «My disciple has spoken an inspired word. But

we cannot accept it because the Angel of God has not yet cleansed us of our past with the live coal taken from the Altar of God... And perhaps, even if the cry of His voice» and he points at Jesus «should unhinge these doors, we would not yet believe...» He lifts the hem of his wide snow-white mantle and pulls it over his head, almost covering his face, and goes away.

Jesus watches him go... He then resumes speaking and replies to some people who are grumbling among themselves and seem scandalised and to make their scandal more obvious, they heap insults on Judas of Kerioth, who puts up with them without reacting, but shrugs his shoulders with dissatisfied countenance.

Jesus says:

«I solemnly tell you that those who seem to be illegitimate are instead true sons, and those who are true sons become illegitimate. Listen to this parable.

Once there was a man who had to absent himself from home for a long time because of some business engagements, when his sons were still very young. From the place where he was, he used to write letters to the older sons to keep them in due respect for their father, who was far away, and to remind them of his teaching. The last son, who was born after the father had left, was still at nurse with a woman who lived far from there, in the country of the man's wife, who was not of his race. The wife died when the son was still a baby and away from home. His brothers said: "Let us leave him where he is, with our mother's relatives. Perhaps our father will forget about him and we will gain by it, as there will be one less to divide the property with, when our father dies." And they did so. The child was thus brought up by his mother's relatives, he was unaware of his father's teaching, he did not even know that he had a father and brothers and, what is worse, he bitterly considered: "They have all disowned me as if I were illegitimate", and he even thought that he was, as he was so deeply hurt at being rejected by his father.

It so happened that when he grew up and found a situation because, embittered as he was by the above considerations, he had conceived a strong aversion also for the family of his mother, whom he deemed guilty of adultery – he went to the town where his father was. And without knowing who he was, he approached him and had the opportunity to hear him speak. His father was a wise man. As he did not receive any satisfaction from his remote sons – who by now behaved as it pleased them and were on conventional terms with their remote father, purely to remind him that they were "his" sons and therefore he should bear that in mind in his will – the old man devoted himself to giving

good advice to the young people he approached in the land where he was. The young son was attracted by such righteousness, which was so fatherly for many young men and he not only approached him but he availed himself of every word of the old man, thus soothing his embittered spirit. The man was taken ill and had to decide to go back to his fatherland. And the young man said to him: "Sir, you are the only person who has spoken to me with justice, elevating my spirit. Allow me to follow you as your servant. I do not want to relapse into my previous evil state." "Come with me. You will take the place of a son, of whom I have never been able to get news." And they went back to the paternal house together.

Neither the father, nor the brothers, nor the young man himself realised that the Lord had once again gathered together those of the same blood under one roof. But the father had to shed many tears because of the sons known to him, because he found that they had forgotten his teaching, had become greedy and hard-hearted, without faith in God, but with many idolatries in their hearts: pride, avarice and lust were their gods and they would not listen to anything which was not human profit. The stranger, instead, approached the Lord more and more, and he became just, kind, loving and obedient. His brothers hated him, because their father loved him, although he was a stranger. But he forgave them and loved them, because he had understood that peace is to be found in love.

One day the father, who was disgusted with the behaviour of his sons, said: "You have taken no interest in your mother's relatives, and not even in your brother. You remind me of the behaviour of Jacob's sons towards their brother Joseph. I want to go to that country to find out about him. I may find him and be comforted by him." And he took leave both of the sons known to him and of the young stranger, whom he gave a sum of money that he might go back to the place from which he had come and start a little business there.

When he arrived in the country of his dead wife, her relatives told him that the forsaken son had changed his original name Moses into Manasseh, because by his birth he had really made his father forget that he was a just man, as he had abandoned his child.

"Do not do me wrong! I was told that all traces of the boy had been lost, and I did not even hope to find any of you. But tell me. What is he like? Has he grown into a strong man? Is he like his mother who died in giving birth to him? Is he kind? Does he love me?"

“He is strong, indeed, and he is as handsome as his mother was beautiful, but his eyes are dark. And on his side he has the same birthmark as his mother. And he has a slight lisp, like you. He was grown up when he left here, exacerbated by his fate, as he doubted his mother's modesty and he bore you ill-will. He would have been kind if he had had no ill-will in his soul. He went across mountains and rivers as far as Trapetius to... “

“Did you say Trapetius? In Synopy? Tell me! I was there and I met a young man with a slight lisp, he was alone and sad, and he was so kind although he appeared to be rather harsh. Was it him? Tell me!”

“Perhaps it was. Look for him. On his right hand side he has a dark birthmark in relief, as your wife had.”

The man departed at once, hoping to find the stranger in his house. But he had left to go back to the colony of Synopy. And the man followed him... He found him. He made him go to his house to examine his side. He identified him. He fell on his knees praising God Who had restored his son to him, a son who was much better than the others who were becoming more and more brutish, whereas this one had become more and more holy during the months which had intervened. And he said to his good son: “You will have the share of your brothers because, without being loved by anyone, you have become more just than they are.”

Was it not fair? It was. I solemnly tell you that those are true sons of God who, although rejected by the world, despised, hated, insulted, forsaken as if they were illegitimate children, considered a disgrace and calamity, know how to surpass the sons who grew up at home but rebelled against its laws. The fact that one comes from Israel does not entitle one to enter Heaven, neither is that destiny guaranteed by the fact that one is a Pharisee, a scribe or a doctor. *It is necessary to have good will and follow the Doctrine of love generously, becoming new in it and children of God in spirit and truth through it.*

You, who are listening to Me, must bear in mind that many who feel safe in Israel will be supplanted by those whom they consider publicans, prostitutes, Gentiles, pagans and galley-slaves. *The Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those who can put new vigour and faith into their lives by accepting Truth and Love.»*

Jesus turns round and goes towards the group of sick proselytes. «Can you believe what I said?» He asks in a loud voice.

«Yes, Lord!» they reply in chorus.

«Do you want to accept Truth and Love?»

«Yes, Lord.»

«If I gave you nothing but that, would you be satisfied?»

«Lord, You know what we need most. Give us Your peace and eternal Life above all.»

«Stand up and go and praise the Lord! You are all cured in the holy Name of God.»

And He quickly turns His steps towards the nearest gate, mingling in the crowds who have filled up Jerusalem, before the excitement and amazement in the Court of Pagans becomes a delirious search for Him.

The bewildered apostles lose sight of Him. Only Marjiam, who never let go the hem of His mantle, is running happily beside Him and says: «Thank You so much, Master! Thanks, on behalf of John! I wrote everything while You were speaking. I have only to add the miracle. Oh! It's wonderful! Just for him! It will make him so happy!...»

364. At Gethsemane and Bethany. The boy disciple Marjiam accuses Judas of being a desecrator.

3rd January 1946.

Jesus enters the quiet green Garden of Gethsemane.

Marjiam is still with Him and he laughs thinking of how anxiously Peter must be rushing to join them. He says: «Oh! Master! I wonder how he must be grumbling! And if You had gone on to Bethany instead of stopping here, he would be in a desolate state.»

Jesus also smiles looking at the youth and He replies: «Yes. He will overwhelm Me with his moaning. But it will teach him to be more careful the next time. While I was speaking, he was not paying attention, but talking to other people...» (Peter earlier had been distracted while Jesus was teaching, and did

not notice Him leaving).

«There were asking him questions, Lord» says Marjiam, who no longer laughs, but tries to justify Peter.

«One can make a gesture with good grace that one will reply later, when the Word of the Lord has finished speaking. Remember that, for your future life, when you will be a priest. You must exact the greatest respect while you teach and in the place where you teach.»

«But then, Lord, it will be poor Marjiam who will be speaking...»

«It does not matter. It is always God Who speaks through the lips of His servants, in the hours of their ministry. And as such He is to be listened to in silence and with respect.»

Marjiam pulls a wry face, which is expressive of his internal feeling.

Jesus notices it and says: «Are you not convinced? Why such an expression? Speak, son, without any fear.»

«My Lord, I was just wondering whether God is on the lips and in the hearts of His priests at present, and I was terrified at the thought that future priests may be like them... And I concluded saying that... many priests make the Lord cut a poor figure... I have certainly committed a sin... But they are so nasty and greedy, so arid... that...»

«Do not judge. But remember your sensation of disgust. Bear it in mind in future. And with all your strength avoid being like those who disgust you and ensure that those under your direction are not like them either. Make the evil you see be useful for a good purpose. Every action and piece of knowledge must be changed into good through righteous judgement and will.»

«Oh! Lord! Before we go into the house, which is already in sight, please reply to another question! You do not deny that priests at present are faulty. You tell me not to judge. But You judge. And You can do so. And You judge with justice. Now listen, Lord, to my question. When priests of the present speak of God and of religion, we know what the majority of them are like, but I am referring to the worst among them, are we to listen to them as being truthful?»

«Yes, My son, always. Out of respect for their mission. When they perform actions pertaining to their ministry, they are no longer Annas, a man, or Sadoc, a man, and so forth. They are “the priest.” Always separate poor humanity from

ministry.»

«But if they act even so badly...»

«God will provide. And then!... Listen, Marjiam! There is no man entirely good or entirely wicked. And no one is so entirely good as to be entitled to judge his brothers as being completely wicked. We must bear in mind our own faults, and set against them the good qualities of those we want to judge, we shall then have the right measure for a charitable judgement. I have not yet found a completely wicked man.»

«Not even Doras, Lord?»

«Not even him, because he is an honest husband and a loving father.»

«Not even Doras' father?»

«He, too, was an honest husband and a loving father.»

«But he was nothing but that!»

«He was nothing but that. But in that respect he was not wicked. So he was not totally wicked.»

«Is Judas not wicked either?»

«No.»

«But he is not good.»

«He is not totally good as he is not totally wicked. Are you not convinced of what I am saying?»

«I am convinced that You are totally good and that You are completely devoid of wickedness. Yes, I am persuaded that You are so. So much so, that You never accuse anyone...»

«Oh! My dear son! If I uttered the first syllable of a word of accusation, you would all assail the person accused, like wild beasts!... *I prevent you from doing so, so that you may not get stained with the sin of rash judgement.* Try to understand Me, Marjiam. It is not the question that I do not see evil, where there is evil, or that I do not see the mixture of good and evil in some people. Neither is the question that I do not understand whether a soul rises above or falls below the level to which I led it. It has nothing to do with all that, son. But *it is a matter of prudence to avoid lack of charity in you. And I will always do so.*

Also in future, when I shall have to declare My opinion on a person. Do you not know, son, that at times a word of praise and of encouragement is of more avail than many reproaches? Do you not know that out of one hundred very bad cases, considered as relatively good, at least half become really good, because, after being helped by My word, they are assisted also by very kind people, who would otherwise shun men who are pointed out as being very wicked? *Souls are to be supported, not depressed.* But if I were not the first to support them and cover up their faults, pressing you to be kind to them and assist them, you would never devote yourselves to them with active clemency. Remember that, Marjiam...»

«Yes, Lord... (a deep sigh). I will remember that... (another deep sigh)... But it is so difficult in the face of certain evidence...»

Jesus stares at him. But He can only see the upper part of the forehead of Marjiam, who has lowered his face.

«Marjiam, look up. Look at Me. And tell Me: which evidence is it difficult to ignore?»

Marjiam gets mixed up... His bronzed face blushes... He replies: «Well... there are many, Lord...»

Jesus insists: «Why did you mention Judas? Because he is one “evidence.” Perhaps the one which is more difficult for you to overcome... What has Judas done to you? In what did he scandalise you?» and Jesus lays His hand on the shoulder of the youth, who has blushed so much that he has become deep purple.

Marjiam looks at Him with tears shining in his eyes, he then frees himself and runs away shouting: «Judas is a desecrator!... But I cannot tell... Respect me, Lord!...» and he hides in the wood, called in vain by Jesus, Who makes a gesture of disheartened grief.

But His voice has drawn the attention of the people in the house at Gethsemane. And Jonah appears at the kitchen door with Jesus' Mother, followed by the women disciples: Mary of Clopas, Mary Salome and Porphirea. When they see Jesus they set out to meet Him.

«Peace be with you all! Here I am, Mother!»

«All alone? Why?»

«I came ahead of the others. I left them at the Temple... But I was with Marjiam...»

«And where is my son now? I don't see him» asks Porphirea who looks rather upset.

«He went up there... But he will be here shortly. Have you enough food for everybody? The others will soon be here.»

«No, Lord, we have not. You said that You were going to Bethany...»

«Of course... But later I thought that it was better to come here. Go quickly to get what is necessary and come back at once. I will stay here with My Mother.»

The women disciples obey at once without any objection.

Jesus remains alone with Mary and they walk slowly under the thick tree branches, through which thin needlelike sunbeams filter delineating tiny golden circles on the green grass.

«I am going to Bethany after our meal, with Simon.»

«Simon of Jonah?»

«No, Simon Zealot. And I am taking Marjiam with Me...» Jesus becomes silent and pensive.

Mary notices and asks: «Has Marjiam displeased You?»

«No, Mother. On the contrary! What makes You think so?»

«Why are You pensive?... Why were You calling him so insistently? And why did he leave You? Why did he run away from You as if he were ashamed? He did not even come to greet his mother and Me!»

«The boy ran away because of a question of Mine.»

«Oh!...» Mary is deeply astonished. She is silent for a short while, then She whispers, as if She were talking to Herself: «The couple in the Earthly Paradise ran away after their sin, when they heard the voice of God... But we must understand the boy, Son. He is growing into a man... and perhaps... Satan bites every man, Son» says Mary in a pitiful imploring voice...

Jesus looks at Her and says: «How motherly You are! You are the “Mother”! But do not think that the boy has sinned. On the contrary, I assure You that he is

suffering because he has been hurt by a striking disclosure. He is pure and very good... I will take him with Me today, so that he may realise, without being told, that I understand him. Words would be of no use, and in any case I would not be able to find any which could justify the *desecration of innocence*.» Jesus utters the last words in a severe voice.

«Oh! Son! Is it as bad as that? I will not ask You any name. But if any of us was able to upset the boy, it could only be one... What a demon!»

«Let us go and look for Marjiam, Mother. He will not run away from You.»

They go and find him behind a hawthorn bush.

«Were you gathering flowers for Me, My dear son?» asks Mary going towards him and embracing him...

«No, but I was longing for You» says Marjiam with his face still wet with tears.

«And I have come. Let us go now, because today you are going to Bethany with My Jesus! And you must be dressed properly.»

Marjiam's face shines with joy, as he has already overcome his embarrassment, and he says: «Just He and I?»

«And Simon Zealot.»

Marjiam, who is still a boy, leaps for joy and runs out of his hiding place and falls on Jesus' chest. He is excited.

But Jesus smiles and encourages him saying: «Go and see whether your father has arrived.» And while Marjiam runs away, Jesus remarks: «He is still a child, although so sensible in thought. It is a real crime to upset his heart. But I will take the necessary action» and He walks towards the house with Mary.

Before they arrive there they see Marjiam running back towards them.

«Master... Mother... There are some people... some of those who were in the Temple... The proselytes... There is a woman... A woman who wants to see You, Mother... She says that she met You in Bethlehem... Her name is Naomi.»

«I met so many women, then! But let us go...»

They arrive at the little opening where the house is. A group of people are waiting for Jesus and as soon as they see Him they prostrate themselves. But a woman stands up at once and runs towards Mary throwing herself at Her feet

and calling Her by Her name.

«Who are you? I do not remember you. Stand up.»

The woman stands up and is about to speak when the apostles arrive panting.

«Lord, why did You do that? We have been running about Jerusalem like crazy people. We thought that You had gone to Johanna's or to Annaleah's... Why did You not remain with us?» they ask rather confusedly.

«Since we are now all together, there is no sense in explaining why. Let this woman speak in peace.»

They all gather round her to listen to her.

«You do not remember me, o Mary of Bethlehem. But for thirty-one years I have remembered Your name and Your face as the symbols of mercy. I had come from far, too, from Perga, because of the Edict. And I was pregnant. But I was hoping to get back home in time. My husband was taken ill on the way and he languished and died in Bethlehem. I gave birth to my child twenty days before he died. And my crying pierced the sky and desiccated my breast and turned my milk into poison. And both my son and I became covered with blisters... And we were thrown into a cavern and left there to die... Well... You were the only one who came cautiously, now and again, for a full month, and You brought us food and treated our sores, weeping with me and suckling my child, who owes his life to You... You risked being stoned because they called me the “leper woman”... Oh! My sweet star! I have not forgotten that. I went away when I was cured. And at Ephesus I heard of the slaughter. I looked for You for such a long time. I could not believe that You had been killed with Your Son during that dreadful night. But I never found You. Last summer a man from Ephesus heard Your Son, he found out who He was, he followed Him for some time and was with Him and with other people at the Tabernacles... And when he came back, he told me. And I came to see You, Holy Mother, before I die. I came to bless You for every drop of milk You gave my John, depriving Your blessed Son of it...» The woman is weeping, in a respectful attitude, with her head slightly bent, holding Mary's arms with her hands...

«One should never refuse to feed a baby, sister. And...»

«Oh! no. I cannot be Your sister! You are the Mother of the Saviour, and I was a poor forlorn woman, far from her house, a widow with a suckling, whose breast was as dry as a torrent in summer... I would have died without You. You gave

me everything and I was able to go back to my brothers, who are merchants in Ephesus, thanks to You.»

«We were two mothers, two poor mothers, with two babies, in the wide world. It was your grief to be a widow, and Mine to be pierced because of My Son, as old Simeon told me in the Temple. I only did my duty as a sister by giving you what you no longer had. Is your son alive?»

«He is over there. And Your holy Son cured him this morning. May He be blessed for that!»

And she prostrates herself before the Saviour shouting: «John, come and thank the Lord.»

A man, of the same age as Jesus, leaves his companions and comes forward. He is strong and his face is honest, even if he is not handsome. But the expression of his deep eyes is beautiful.

«Peace to you, brother of Bethlehem. Of what disease did I cure you?»

«Of blindness, Lord. I had lost one eye, and I was about to lose the other one. I was the head of the synagogue, but I could no longer read the sacred rolls.»

«You will now read them with greater faith.»

«No, Lord. I will now read You. I want to remain with You as one of Your disciples, without setting up a claim for the milk that I sucked from the breast that nourished You. The days of one month are nothing and cannot create any tie, but the mercy of Your Mother in the past and Yours this morning are everything.»

Jesus addresses the woman: «And what do you say?»

«That my son will belong to You twice. Accept him, Lord. And the dream of poor Naomi will be fulfilled.»

«Very well. You will belong to the Christ.» And turning towards His apostles He says: «Receive your companion in the name of the Lord.»

The proselytes are elated with emotion. All the men would like to remain, but Jesus says firmly: «No. You will remain what you are. Go back to your homes, preserve your faith and wait for the hour to be called. And may the Lord be always with you. Go.»

«Shall we find You here again?» they ask.

«No. Like birds that fly from branch to branch, I move around without resting. You will not find Me here. I have no itinerary and no dwelling place. But if it is just, we shall meet again and you will hear Me. Go. Let the woman stay with the new disciple.»

And He enters the house followed by the women and the apostles who are deeply moved and comment on the episode which they ignored so far, and on Mary's sublime charity.

And Jesus goes to Bethany at a good pace. Simon Zealot and Marjiam are beside Him. They are both very happy to have been chosen for that visit.

Marjiam, who is now in better spirits, asks many questions about the woman who came from Ephesus and whether Jesus was aware of the fact.

«I did not know. The kind actions of My Mother are countless and are done in such mild silence that they are generally unknown.»

«But the episode is really beautiful» says the Zealot.

«Yes, so much so that I want to let John of Endor know. What do You think, Master? Shall we find his letters at Bethany?»

«I am almost certain that we shall.»

«We should find also the woman who was cured of leprosy» remarks the Zealot.

«Yes. She complied with the precepts faithfully. But the time of her purification must now be over.»

Bethany appears on its tableland. They pass in front of the house where once there were peacocks, flamingoes and stilt-birds. The house is now closed and forsaken. Simon notices it.

But his remark is interrupted by the cheerful greeting of Maximinus, who appears at the gate. «Oh! Holy Master! How much happiness in so much grief!»

«Peace to you. Why grief?»

«Because Lazarus is suffering terribly with his ulcerated legs. And we do not know what to do to relieve his pain. But he will feel better, at least spiritually, when he sees You.»

They go into the garden and while Maximinus runs ahead, they walk slowly towards the house.

Mary of Magdala runs out shouting adoringly: «Rabboni» and she is followed more calmly by Martha. They both look very pale like people who have suffered and lost sleep.

«Stand up. Let us go to Lazarus at once.»

«Oh! Master! Master, You can do everything, cure my brother!» implores Martha.

«Yes, good Master! He suffers more than he can bear! He is worn out and he groans with pain. He will certainly die, if he continues so. Have mercy on him, Lord!» urges Mary.

«I am full of mercy. But the time of miracle has not yet come for him. Let him be strong and be strong with him. Help him to do the will of God.»

«Ah! Do You mean that he must die?!» asks Martha moaning and weeping.

And Mary, whose eyes are shining with tears and love, a double love, for Jesus and her brother, exclaims: «Oh! Master, but in this way You prevent me from following and serving You, and You prevent my brother from enjoying my resurrection. Do You not want Lazarus' house to rejoice because of a resurrection?»

Jesus looks at her smiling kindly and wittily and He says: «Just for one? One only? Come on! You do not think much of Me if you think that I can do one thing only! Be good and strong. Let us go. And do not weep like that. You would dispirit him with grievous suspicion.» And He sets out ahead of them.

In order to nurse Lazarus more comfortably, they have placed him in a room near the library, opposite the dining hall. Maximinus shows Him the door, but lets Jesus go in alone.

«Peace to you, Lazarus, My dear friend!»

«Oh! Holy Master! Peace to You. There is no more peace for me, for my body. And my soul is depressed. I am suffering so much, Lord! Give me the dear

order: «Lazarus, come out» and I will rise completely cured to serve You...»

«I will give it to you, Lazarus. But not now» replies Jesus embracing him.

Lazarus is very thin and yellowish, with deep-set eyes. He is clearly very ill and weak. He weeps like a child showing his bluish swollen legs, with sores, which I think are varicose and are bleeding in several parts. He perhaps hopes that by showing Jesus the dreadful situation, He may be moved and work the miracle. But Jesus covers the sores delicately with the linen bandages sprayed with balm.

«Have you come to stay here?» asks Lazarus disappointedly.

«No, but I will come here frequently.»

«What? Are You not spending Passover with me this year either? I made them bring me here on purpose. At the Feast of the Tabernacles You promised me that You would stay with me for a long time after the Dedication...»

«And I will. But not now. Shall I annoy you if I sit here, on the edge of your bed?»

«Oh! no. On the contrary the coolness of Your hand seems to mitigate the heat of my fever. Why are You not staying, Lord?»

«Because as you are tormented by sores, I am tormented by enemies. Although Bethany is considered to be within the limits for the Supper for everybody, in My case it would be considered a sin, if I celebrated Passover here. Everything I do is considered sinful by the Sanhedrin and the Pharisees...»

«Ah! the Pharisees! That is true! But in my house, then... At least that!»

«Of course! But I will mention it at the last moment, as a precaution.»

«Yes! Do not trust them. Everything went well with John. You know? Ptolmai came yesterday with other people and he brought some letters for You. My sisters have them. But where are Martha and Mary? Are they not doing the honours of the house to You?» Lazarus is restless like many sick people.

«Do not worry. They are outside with Simon and Marjiam. I came with them. And I do not need anything. I will call them.» And He calls those who had wisely remained outside.

Martha goes out and comes back with two rolls which she hands to Jesus. In the meantime Mary informs them that a servant of Nicodemus has said that he has

come ahead of his master, who is coming with Joseph of Arimathea. And at the same time Lazarus remembers a woman who «came yesterday in Your name» he says.

«Ah! Yes! Do you know who she is?»

«She told us. She is the daughter of a rich man from Jericho, who went to Syria many years ago, when he was young. He called her Anastasica in remembrance of the flower of the desert. However, she would not reveal the name of her husband» explains Martha.

«It is not necessary. He repudiated her and thus she is only “the disciple.” Where is she?»

«She was tired and she is sleeping. She had a hard time during the last days and nights. If You wish so, I will call her.»

«No. Let her sleep. I will see to her tomorrow.»

Lazarus looks at Marjiam admiringly. Marjiam is on tenterhooks. He would like to know the contents of the rolls. Jesus notices it and opens them. Lazarus says: «What? Does he know?»

«Yes, he does, as well as the others, with the exception of Nathanael, Philip, Thomas and Judas...»

«You did the right thing in not letting him know» exclaims Lazarus. «I have many doubts and fears...»

«I am not unwise, My dear friend» says Jesus interrupting him and He reads the rolls and then He relates the main pieces of news, that is, that the two have settled down, that the school is thriving and that everything would be proceeding very well, if John's health were not declining. But He can say no more because they are informed of the arrival of Nicodemus and Joseph.

«May God protect You, Master! Always, as this morning!»

«Thank you, Joseph. And you, Nicodemus, were you not there?»

«No, I was not. But I heard that You had arrived and I thought I should come to Lazarus's house, as I was almost certain that I would find You here. And Joseph joined me.»

They speak of the events of the morning, standing around the bed of Lazarus,

who is greatly interested in them and seems relieved of his suffering.

«But Gamaliel, Lord! Did You hear him?» asks Joseph of Arimathea.

«Yes, I did.»

Nicodemus says: «I instead say: But Judas of Kerioth, Lord! After You left I found him shouting like a demon in the middle of a group of disciples of the rabbis. He was accusing and defending You at the same time. And I am sure that he was convinced that he was doing the right thing. They wanted to find fault with You, and were certainly instigated to do so by their teachers. He refuted their accusations heatedly saying: “My Master has one fault only! He does not enhance His power enough. He misses good opportunities. He wearies good people with His excessive meekness. He is King! And He must act as a King. You treat Him as a servant because He is so meek. He ruins Himself by being nothing but meek. The only thing that counts with you, vile cruel people, is the lash of absolute violent power. Oh! why can I not make a violent Saul of Him!”»

Jesus shakes His head without saying anything.

«And yet, he loves You in his own way» remarks Nicodemus.

«What a disconcerting man!» exclaims Lazarus.

«Yes. You are right. Although I have been with him for two years, I do not understand him yet» confirms the Zealot.

Mary of Magdala stands up with the majesty of a queen and in her beautiful voice she proclaims: «I have understood him more than anybody else: he is abomination placed close to Perfection. And there is nothing else to be said» and she goes out to perform a task and takes Marjiam with her.

«Perhaps Mary is right» says Lazarus.

«I think so, too» says Joseph.

«And what do You think, Master?»

«I say that Judas is a “man.” As Gamaliel is. A limited man close to infinite God. Man is so limited in thought, that unless he breathes in a supernatural atmosphere, he can accept one idea only, with which he becomes encrusted and remains forever. And he does so even against evidence, stubbornly and obstinately, even out of faith in what has struck him most. Gamaliel, after all,

has faith, like few people in Israel, in the Messiah, Whom he recognised and of Whom he got a glimpse in a Child. And he is faithful to the words of that Child... And the same applies to Judas. Saturated as he is with the Messianic idea, as most people in Israel entertain it, and in which he was confirmed by the first manifestation he had of Me, he sees and wants to see Christ as king. An earthly powerful king... and he is faithful to such opinion. Oh! How many, even in future, *will ruin themselves because of an erroneous concept of faith*, stubborn against reason! But what do you think? That it is easy to follow truth and justice in everything? What do you think? That it is easy to reach salvation just because one is Gamaliel or the apostle Judas? No. I solemnly tell you that *it is easier for a boy, for a common believer to be saved, than it is for one elevated to a special task or mission*. Generally the pride of their vocation overwhelms those who are called to a special destiny, and such pride opens the door to Satan and rejects God. *It is easier for stars to fall than it is for stones*. The Cursed One strives to put stars out and he insinuates himself crookedly to lever up the chosen ones and thus overturn them. If a thousand or ten thousand men fall into common errors, *their ruin affects them only*. But if one appointed to a special destiny falls and becomes the instrument of Satan instead of God's, his voice instead of "mine", his disciple instead of "mine", *then the ruin is much greater and may even bring about deep heresies, which injure countless souls*. The good I give will bear much good *if it falls on humble ground, which will remain humble*. But if it falls on proud ground or which becomes proud because of the gift received, then the good turns into evil. Gamaliel was granted one of the first manifestations of the Christ. It was to be his early call to the Christ. That is why he is deaf to My Voice calling him. Judas was granted to be an apostle: one of the twelve apostles among the thousands of men in Israel. It was to be his sanctification. But what will it be?... My friends, *man is the eternal Adam... Adam had everything*. Everything except one thing. He wanted that one. And if man would only remain Adam! Very often he becomes Lucifer. *He has everything except divinity. He wants that*. He wants the supernatural to astonish, to be applauded, feared, known, celebrated... And in order to have something which God only can give gratuitously, he embraces Satan, who is the Monkey of God and gives simulated supernatural gifts. Oh! How horrible is the fate of those demons! I leave you, My friends. I will withdraw for a little while. I need to concentrate on God...»

Jesus, Who is quite upset, goes out... Those who are left: Lazarus, Joseph, Nicodemus and the Zealot, look at one another.

«Did you notice how upset He was?» Joseph asks Lazarus in a low voice.

«I did. He seemed to be seeing a dreadful sight.»

«What can be worrying Him?» asks Nicodemus.

«He only and the Eternal Father know» replies Joseph.

«Do you know what it is, Simon?»

«No. He has certainly been depressed for months.»

«May God save Him! But hatred is certainly growing.»

«Yes, Joseph. Hatred is growing... I am afraid that Hatred will soon overcome Love.»

«Don't say so, Simon! If that must happen I will no longer ask to be cured! It is better to die than watch the most dreadful error.»

«The most dreadful sacrilege, you should say, Lazarus...»

«And yet... Israel is quite capable of that. It is ready to repeat the gesture of Lucifer by going to war with the Blessed Lord» says Nicodemus with a sigh.

Sad silence follows, as if each of them had a lump in his throat... It is getting dark in the room where four honest people are meditating on future criminals.

365. Letters from Antioch.

22nd January 1946.

Jesus has left Bethany together with those who were with Him, that is, Simon Zealot and Marjiam. But they have been joined by Anastasica, who is completely covered by her veil and is walking beside Marjiam, while Jesus is a little behind them with Simon. The two couples are speaking while walking. They are talking on their own of what is closest to their hearts.

Anastasia says to Marjiam, continuing on the same subject of their conversation: «I am dying to meet Her.» The woman is perhaps speaking of Eliza of Bethzur. «Believe me, I was not so deeply moved when I got married or when I was declared a leper. How shall I greet Her?»

And Marjiam with a kind smile, which is grave at the same time, replies: «Oh! with Her true name! Mother!»

«But I do not know Her! Is that not too familiar? After all, who am I, as compared with Her?»

«What I was last year. Nay, you are much more than I was! I was a poor, dirty, frightened, coarse little orphan. And yet from the very first moment She always called me son and She has been a real mother to me. Last year I was trembling with excitement waiting to see Her. But when I saw Her, I no longer trembled. I no longer suffered from the terror that had remained in my blood since I had seen, with my eyes of a boy, first the fury of nature which destroyed my house and family completely and later... and later, still with my eyes of a child, I had to see how man can be more cruel than jackals and vampires... And I trembled... I wept... all the time... and I felt here a painful sensation of fear, of grief, of hatred, of everything... In a few months I became acquainted with all the evil, sorrow and cruelty there is in the world... And I could not believe that there was still kindness, love, protection...»

«How? When the Master took you?!... And when you were among His disciples, who are so good?!»

«I still trembled, sister... and I still hated. Oh! It took me a long time to be convinced that I was not to be afraid... And it took even longer to be able not to hate those who had made my soul suffer by acquainting it with what man can be: a demon clad as a beast. One does not suffer without long lasting consequences, particularly when one is a child... A mark is left, because a child's heart is still tender and warm with the kisses of his mother and it hungers more for kisses than for bread. And instead of kisses he receives blows...»

«Poor child!»

«Yes. Poor. So poor! I no longer had any hope in God or respect for men... I was afraid of man. Even when I was close to Jesus or in Peter's arms, I was afraid... I used to say: “Is it possible? Oh! This will not last. They will get tired of being good, too... And I was longing to be with Mary. A mother is always a mother, is

she not? And in fact, when I saw Her, when I was in Her arms, I was no longer afraid. I understood that my past was over and that from hell I had come to paradise... When I saw that they were forgetting about me and leaving me aside, I was upset for the last time... I always suspected mischief. And I cried. Oh! How lovingly She embraced me then. I never mourned my mother's death again since that moment and I did not tremble any more... Mary is kindness and peace for unhappy people...»

«And I need kindness and peace, too...» says the woman with a sigh.

«And you will shortly have peace. See the greenery down there? That is where it is hidden, in the house at Gethsemane.»

«And will Eliza be there as well? What shall I say to them. What will they say to me?»

«I do not know whether Eliza is there. She was ill.»

«Oh! She will not die?! If she did, who would accept me as a daughter?»

«Be not afraid. He said: “You will have a mother and a home.” And that is what will happen. Let us walk a little quicker. I cannot restrain myself when I am near Mary.»

They quicken their steps and I can no longer hear them speak.

The Zealot notices that they are almost running along the crowded road and he says to Jesus: «They look like brother and sister. See how friendly they are.»

«Marjiam is good company for anybody. It is a difficult virtue and it is so necessary for his future mission. I am taking care to increase such favourable disposition in him, because it will be very useful to him.»

«You are training him according to Your own taste. Is that right, Master?»

«Yes. His age allows Me to do so.»

«And yet, You were able to mould also old John Felix...»

«Yes. Because he let Me destroy him and re-create him completely.»

«That is true. I have noticed that the greatest sinners, once they turn, exceed in justice us, who are relatively guilty. Why?»

«Because their contrition is proportionate to their sin. *Immense*. Consequently it

crushes them under the millstone of sorrow and humility. "I have my sin constantly in mind" says the psalmist. *That keeps their spirits humble*. It is a good remembrance when it is joined to hope and trust in Mercy. Half perfections, and even less than half, very often come to a stand, because they are not spurred by the remorse of having committed grave sins and by the necessity of making amends in order to proceed towards true perfection. *They stagnate like still waters and they are satisfied because they are clear*. But even the clearest water will become slimy and foul, unless motion purifies it of the particles of dust and rubble that the wind blows into it.»

«And are the imperfections, which we allow to exist and persist in us, dust and rubble?»

«Yes, Simon. You are still too stagnant. Your movement towards perfection is almost imperceptible. Do you not know that time flies? *Do you not consider that in the time which is left, you ought to strive to become perfect?* If you do not possess the strength of perfection, to be achieved by means of a firm will in the time which is still left, how will you be able to resist the storm that Satan and his followers will raise against the Master and His Doctrine? The day will come when you will be completely bewildered and you will ask yourselves: "Why were we utterly overwhelmed, since we were with Him for three years?" The answer is within you, in your behaviour! He who strives more to become perfect in the time still left, will be more able to remain faithful.»

«Three years... So... Oh! my Lord!... So shall we be losing You next spring?»

«These trees have their little fruits and I will taste them when they are ripe. But after the fruit of this year, I shall not taste the new crop... Do not be distressed, Simon. Distress is sterile. Strengthen yourself in justice in order to be able to be faithful at the dreadful moment.»

«Yes, I will. With all my strength. Can I tell the others as well? So that they may be prepared, too?»

«Yes, you can. But only those with a strong will, will do it.»

«And what about the others? Will they be lost?»

«No. But they will be severely tried by their attitude. They Will be like one who thought that he was strong and finds himself knocked down and defeated. They will be dumbfounded and humiliated. Humble, at last! Because, believe Me, Simon, if there is no humility, it is not possible to proceed. *Pride is the stone on*

which Satan's pedestal stands. Why keep it in your hearts? Is that dreadful being a pleasant master?»

«No, Master, he is not.»

«And yet you keep in your hearts the supporting point, the chair for his lessons. You are full of pride. You have it for everything and for every reason. *You are even proud of being "My disciples"*. But, how silly of you, does the comparison of what you are with Him Who chose you, not cure you? *Not because I called you, you will be saints*. It will depend on what you have become after My call. *Holiness is a building that each one builds by himself*. Wisdom can teach him the method and plan. *But it is up to you to do the material work.*»

«That is true. So, we shall not be lost. After the trial, will we be more holy because we are humble?...»

«Yes.» A short severe «yes».

«Is that how You say it, Master?»

«Yes, that is how I say it.»

«You would like us to be holy before the trial...»

«Yes, I would, with regard to everybody.»

«Everybody? Shall we not be all equal in the trial?»

«*Neither before it, nor during it, nor after it you will be equal. And yet I gave everyone the same word...*»

«And the same love, Master. We are very guilty towards You...»

Jesus sighs...

The Zealot, after a rather long silence, is about to speak. But the apostles and disciples who have met Marjiam at the lower slopes of Gethsemane, are hurrying towards them, and Simon is silent while Jesus replies to the greeting of everyone and then goes towards the olive-grove and the house, walking beside Peter.

Peter informs Him that they have been on the look-out since dawn, that Eliza is still ill in Johanna's house, that some Pharisees had come the previous evening, that... that... a bundle of rather confused news, and at last the question: «And what about Lazarus?», to which Jesus replies in detail. Peter, who is very

curious, cannot refrain from asking: «And... nothing, Lord? No... news?»

«Yes. You will be told in good time. Where is Marjiam with the woman? Already in the house?»

«Oh! no. The woman did not dare to go on. She is sitting on the roadside waiting for You. Marjiam... Marjiam... disappeared. Has he run to the house?»

«Let us quicken our steps.»

But no matter how much they hurry, they do not arrive at the house before Mary with Her sister-in-law, Salome, Porphirea, the wives of Bartholomew and Philip, have come out to venerate Him.

Jesus greets them from afar and turns His steps towards the place where Anastasica is sitting humbly, He takes her by the hand and leads her towards His Mother and the women. «Here is the flower of this Passover, Mother. One only this year. May it be pleasing to You because I brought it.»

The woman has knelt down. Mary bends and raises her saying: «Daughters are in the hearts not at the feet of their mothers. Come, My daughter. Let us become familiar with our faces, as our souls already know one another. Here are some of our sisters. Some more will be coming. Let it be a kind family full of love for all its members and full of holiness for the glory of God.»

The women disciples kiss one another lovingly and exchange greetings. They enter the house and go up to the terrace, which is surrounded by the white blossoms of hundreds of olive-trees. The groups part: Jesus with the men, the women with the newcomer. Susanna, who had gone to town, comes back with her husband. Johanna arrives with the children. Annaleah appears with her angelical face; and Jairus, who was with the disciples while they were running towards Jesus, comes back with his daughter, who joins the group of the women, near Mary, Who caresses her.

There is peace and love in the gathering. Then the sun sets and before dismissing those who have to go back to their own houses or to the ones where they are guests, Jesus gathers them all together to pray and blesses them. He then dismisses them and remains with those who prefer to crowd in the house at Gethsemane or to spend the night under the olive-trees, rather than go away. So the women – who remain are: Mary, Mary of Alphaeus, Salome, Anastasica, Porphirea; the men are: Jesus, Peter, Andrew, James and Judas of Alphaeus, James and John of Zebedee, Simon Zealot, Matthew and Marjiam.

Supper is soon over. Then Jesus invites His Mother and Mary of Alphaeus to go with Him and the disciples into the silent olive-grove.

Perhaps the other women would like to go as well. But Jesus does not invite them, on the contrary He says to Salome and Porphirea: «Entertain our new sister speaking of holy things and then go to bed without waiting for us. Peace be with you.» So the three women resign themselves to their destiny.

Peter is rather sulky and he becomes silent; all the others, instead, are talking while going in group towards the rock of Jesus, future agony. They sit on its edge, facing Jerusalem, which is slowly calming down, after the confusion of the day.

«Light some branches, Peter.»

«Why?»

«Because I want to read to you what John and Syntyche have written. Since you are dissatisfied, you had better know that that is the reason why I did not let the three women come.»

«But my wife was there that evening!...»

«But it would have been impolite to exclude Salome only of the old women disciples... In any case it will give you the opportunity to give vent to your desire to speak, as you will be able to tell your prudent wife what you are now going to hear.»

Peter, rejoicing at the praise of his wife and at the permission to inform her of the secret, is no longer sulky and he busies himself lighting a bright fire, from which flames rise straight and still in the calm air.

Jesus takes out of His waist the two letters, He unfolds them and reads them in the middle of the circle of eleven attentive faces.

«“To Jesus of Nazareth honour and blessings. To Mary of Nazareth blessings and peace. To my holy brothers peace and good health. To my beloved Marjiam peace and caresses.

Tears and smiles are in my heart and on my face as I sit down to write this letter to you all. Recollections, nostalgia, hope and peace for the duty I have accomplished, are with me. All the past, which is of value to me, that is, the past, which began twelve months ago, is before me and a psalm of gratitude to

God rises from my heart, as He has been too merciful towards me, a culprit. May You be blessed and with You the Holy Mother Who gave birth to You in this world, and the other mother whom I remember as mercy incarnate. And with You may Peter, John, Simon, James and Judas, and the other James, and Andrew and Matthew be blessed. And last may my dearest Marjiam be blessed, and I have taken him on my heart to bless him. May you all be blessed for what you have given me, from the moment I met you until the moment I left you! Oh! not of my own will! May God forgive those who tore me away from you! May God forgive them. And may He increase in me the strength to do it. For the time being, through His help and with Him I can do it. But alone, no, I would not yet be able to do it, because too scorching is the injury that they did to me by tearing me away from true Life, from You, Most Holy Jesus. It is still too scorching, notwithstanding Your consolation is a continuous balmy shower to me...”»

Jesus glances over several lines without reading them. And He resumes: «“My life...”» but Peter, who to let the Master see, has taken a blazing branch and is holding it high, standing near Him and craning his neck to see what is written, says: «No, it is not so! Why are You not reading it, Master? You have left something out! I am an ass, but not to the extent that I cannot read slowly. I can read: “Your promises have exceeded my hope...”»

«You are an awful bore! You are worse than a boy!» says Jesus smiling.

«Of course I am! I am almost old! So I am more cunning than a boy.»

«You ought to be also more prudent.»

«Prudence is good with enemies. Here we are with friends. John says something beautiful about You. And I want to know. So that I will know which way to turn in the event You should send me elsewhere, like a bale of goods. Please, read everything! Mother, Please tell Him that it is not fair to give selected news, as if it were little fish. Give us everything: seaweed, mud, small fish and exquisite fish, everything! Will you all help me! You look like dummies to me. And you make me angry! And you are laughing!»

It is almost impossible not to laugh seeing the excitement of Peter who is jumping about, like a restive colt, waving his blazing branch, heedless of the sparks falling on him.

Jesus has to give in, in order to calm him and continues to read.

«“Your promises have exceeded my hope in Your promises. Oh! Holy Master!

When in that sad winter morning You promised me that You would come to comfort Your depressed disciple, I did not understand the true value of Your promise. Sorrow and man's limitation were oppressing the power of my spirit, which was too dull to be able to understand the extent of Your promise.

May You be blessed, o spiritual Visitor of my nights, which thus are not desolation and grief as I foresaw, but expectation of You, or joyful meeting with You. Night, the dread of sick people, of exiles, of lonely people, of culprits, has become for me Felix, really happy to do Your will and serve You, the waiting of the wise virgins for the arrival of the bridegroom'. My poor soul has even more. It has the blessing of being the bride awaiting her Love, who comes to the nuptial room to give her every time the joy of their first meeting and the fortifying ecstasy of their union.

Oh! my Master and Lord, while I bless You for giving me so much, I beg You to remember the other two promises that You made me. The most important one, for the very weak man I am, is not to let me be alive at the hour of Your passion. You are aware of my weakness! Do not let him, who for Your sake despoiled himself of hatred, do not let him put on again the thorny scorching uniform of hatred, through his hatred for Your executioners. The other promise is for Your poor disciple, who is also too weak and imperfect: be near me, as You told me, at the hour of my death. Now that I know that there is no distance for You, and that seas, mountains, rivers and the will of men cannot prevent You from giving the comfort of Your tangible presence to those whom You love, I no longer doubt that I can have You when I breathe my last. Come, Lord Jesus! Come soon to lead me to peace.

Now that I have spoken to You of my soul, I will inform You of my work.

I have many pupils, of every race and country. In order not to hurt any of them, I have divided them, and one day I teach the heathens and the next day the believers, with good profit, owing to the shortage of teachers here. I give the money I earn to the poor, whom I thus attract to the Lord. I have resumed my old name, not because I am fond of it, but out of prudence. When I am in the world, I am 'Felix'. During the hours in which I belong to Jesus, I am 'John': the grace of God. I explained to Philip that my true name was Felix and that I was called John only to be distinguished from my brothers. And he was not amazed owing to the common habit of changing names or calling people by nicknames. I hope to do a good deal of work here, to prepare thus the road for my holy brothers. If I were stronger I would like to go into the country and make Your

Name known there. Perhaps I will be able to do so in early summer or when it is cooler in autumn. If I am fit, I will do so. The pure air at Antigonea, the gardens, which are so placid and beautiful, the flowers, children, little hens, the loving kindness of the gardeners and above all the deep, wise, filial fondness of Syntyche do me a lot of good. I would say that my health has improved. But Syntyche is not of the same opinion, although I only gather her opinion through the diligent continuous care she has for me, for my food, for my resting and to ensure that I do not get cold... But I do feel better. Is this perhaps not the sensation that comes from one's duty accomplished heroically? That is what Syntyche says. And I would like to know whether she is right. Because duty is a moral matter, whilst disease is a bodily matter. I would also like to know whether You come to me really or whether You just appear to my spiritual senses, but so perfectly that I cannot tell where the material reality of Your Presence ends. Dear blessed Master, Your John kneels down asking for Your blessing. Peace and blessings to Your Mother, to Mary and to the holy brothers. A kiss to Marjiam that he may remember to send me Your holy words, which are bread for the exiles working in the vineyard of the Lord.”

That is John's letter... What do you think of it?»

They all exchange their impressions... But the outstanding point is in regard to Jesus' Presence. They harass Him with questions... how it can be, whether it can be, and whether Syntyche sees, and so on...

Jesus beckons to them to be silent and He unfolds Syntyche's roll. He reads:

«“Syntyche to the Lord Jesus with all the love of which she is capable. Veneration and praise to our Blessed Mother. Gratitude and blessings to my brothers in the Lord. The embrace of his far away sister to Marjiam.

John has told You about our life, Master. He has told You very synthetically what he does and what I do in a womanly way. My little school is full of girls and I make a good spiritual profit, because I lead them to You, my Lord, speaking of the true God while we work together. In this region where so many races have mingled, there is an intricate tangle of religions. It is so intricate that... that they are nothing but impracticable religions, shreds of religions of no further use. In the middle there is the rigid uncompromising faith of Israelites, which breaks with its weight the worn out threads of the other religions without achieving anything. As John has pupils, he must act wisely. I can proceed more freely with my girls. Women are always considered inferior beings, so much so

that families of different religions do not care if the girls mix in one school. It is enough if they learn the fruitful art of embroidery. And blessed be the scornful concept the world has of us women, because it allows me to widen the field of my action more and more. Our embroidery work is selling easily and rapidly, our renown is spreading, noblewomen come from afar. I thus have the opportunity of speaking to all of them of God... Oh! how even threads, which become flowers, animals, stars on our looms and on the cloth, are useful to direct souls to the Truth, if one so wishes. As I know several languages I can speak Greek to Greeks, Latin to Romans, Hebrew to Hebrews. With John's assistance I am improving my knowledge of the last language.

Mary's ointment is another means of penetration. I have made a large fresh lot of it, with the essences we have here, and I added a particle of the original ointment, to sanctify it. Ulcers and sores, wounds and chest trouble simply disappear. It is true, however, that while I rub and bandage sore parts, I continuously mention the two holy Names of Jesus and Mary. Nay, playing on the Greek name of Christ, I have called the balm: 'Anointed Myrrh'. Is it not so? Is the healthy essence of the Myrrh of God, Whose begotten Son You are, not in it, o precious Oil, which makes us kings? I very often have to stay up to prepare more fresh ointment and I would ask our Holy Mother to make some more and send it to me for the Feast of the Tabernacles, so that I can mix it with what the humble servant of God has made. But if I am wrong in doing so, tell me, Lord and I will stop doing it.

Dear John praises me a great deal. And what should I say about him? He endures bitter pain, but his strength is wonderful. If I did not know his secret, I would be amazed. But since that night, when coming back from a sick person, I found him in ecstasy and transfigured, and I heard his words, and I prostrated myself as I realised that You were present with Your servant, I can no longer be surprised. Perhaps some of my brothers will be amazed on hearing that I do not regret that I did not see, too. Why should I? Everything You give is good and sufficient. And each of us receives what we deserve and what we need. It is therefore right that John has You visibly, while I have You in my soul only.

Am I happy? As a woman I regret the time I spent with You and Mary. But as a soul, I am very happy, because now only I serve You, my Lord. I consider that time is nothing. I consider that obedience is money to enter Your Kingdom. I consider that to help You is a grace that exceeds even what the poor slave could have dreamed in an hour of rapture and that You have granted me to help You. I

consider that although I am parted from You now, I will finally have You for all eternity. And I sing John's song as wood-larks do in springtime in the golden fields of Hellas. My girls sing it because they say that it is beautiful. I let them sing on the rhythm of the loom, which is so like the rhythm of the oar on that remote day, because I think that the mention of Your name, Mother, predisposes one to Grace.

John is asking me to add the information that he sent You a very good citizen from Antioch. His name is Nicolaus. He is his first conquest for Your flock. We sincerely hope that Nicolaus will not disappoint the high reputation we hold him in our hearts.

Bless Your servant, Lord. Bless her, Mother; bless me all, you saints, and you, too, blessed child, who are growing in wisdom near the Lord.”

That is what Syntyche wrote. And she added a foot-note, unknown to John. She says: “John excels and becomes stronger only in his soul. The rest is declining notwithstanding cures. He relies much on early summer. I do not think that he will be able to do what he says. I am afraid that winter will chill his feeble life... But he is in peace. And he is sanctified by his deeds and his suffering. Support his strength with Your presence, my Lord! I ask You to subject me to every kind of pain in exchange for this gift for Your disciple. As we are sending these letters by Ptolmai, to Lazarus, I beg You to tell him and his sisters that we remember their kindness to us and that we pray constantly and ardently for them.”»

Once again they all exchange their impressions. Andrew bends to ask Mary something and he is amazed at seeing tears on Her face. «Are You weeping?» he asks Her.

«Why are You weeping, Mother» many of them ask.

«I know why She is weeping» says Marjiam.

«Why then?»

«Because John has mentioned the Lord's death.»

«Of course! Is that true? And how does he know, when he no longer was with us, when You predicted it?»

«Because I told him to comfort him.»

«H'm! Comfort!...»

«Yes, comfort. The promise that he will not have to wait long to enter the Kingdom. He deserves it because he excelled you in will and obedience. Let us go back to the house. We will prepare our replies to be given to Ptolmai and you will add your rolls, Marjiam.»

«Ah! I see! He was writing for them!...»

«Yes. Let us go. Tomorrow we will go to the Temple...»

366. The Thursday before Passover. Morning Preliminaries.

23rd January 1946.

Dawn is breaking. Men are emulating birds, when they become active flying, working and singing in the early morning. The house at Gethsemane is awaking slowly, but it is forestalled by the Master, Who is coming back from the prayers He went out to say at daybreak, but He may have been out all night praying.

The nearby camp of the Galileans on the tableland of the Mount of Olives is slowly awaking, and shouts and calls can be heard in the clear air, and although they are dulled by distance, they are sufficiently distinct to make one understand that the pious pilgrims gathered there are about to resume the Passover ceremonies interrupted the previous evening.

The town awakes, and the clamour begins with which it is filled during these overcrowded days, with the braying of market gardeners' donkeys, and the pressure of lamb vendors at the entrance gates, and with the touching bleating of hundreds of little lambs, which are carried on carts, pack-saddles or on shoulders to their tragic destiny, calling their mothers bleating plaintively, not knowing that they should weep because their lives have come so prematurely to an end. And the clamour increases more and more with the shuffling of feet in the streets and people calling one another from one terrace to another, or from terraces to streets and vice-versa. And the noise, deadened by distance, reaches the calm valley of Gethsemane, like the roar of sea waves.

An early sunbeam strikes one of the precious domes of the Temple and makes it

shine as if it were a sun descended upon the earth, a little sun resting on a snow-white pedestal, so beautiful although so small. The men and women disciples look at the golden Spot admiringly. It is the House of the Lord! It is the Temple! To understand what that place meant to Israelites it is enough to watch them staring at it. They seem to be seeing the Most Holy Face of God flashing in the glowing gold lit by the sun. Adoration and love for their country, holy pride of being Hebrews are more clearly expressed by their looks than they could possibly be revealed by their words.

Porphirea, who has not been to Jerusalem for many years, is moved to tears and unawares presses the arm of her husband, who is showing I do not know what to her, and she leans a little against him and like a bride, in love with her bridegroom, admires him and is happy to be instructed by him.

In the meantime the other women are talking in very low voices, in monosyllables, asking one another what is to be done during the day, and Anastasica, who feels like a lost stranger, is a little aside, engrossed in her thoughts.

Mary, Who was speaking to Marjiam, sees her and approaches her embracing her waist with Her arm. «Are you feeling rather lonely, My dear daughter? You will feel better today. See? My Son is telling the apostles to go to the houses of the women disciples to inform them that they are to gather and wait for Him at Johanna's house in the afternoon. He wants to speak to us women and before doing so He will certainly give you a mother. She is very good. I have known her since I was in the Temple. Even then she acted as a mother to the younger virgins. And she will understand your heart because she has suffered very much, too. My Son cured her last year of a deadly melancholy, with which she was affected after the death of her two sons. I am telling you this so that you may know who will be loving you from now on and whom you will love. But as last year I said to Simon Peter, who was receiving Marjiam as his son, I now say to you: "Do not let this affection weaken your heart in its will to serve Jesus." If that should happen, the gift of God would be more harmful than leprosy, because it would extinguish in you the good will that one day will give you the possession of the Kingdom.»

«Do not be afraid, Mother. As for me, I will turn this affection into a flame to excite myself more and more in the service of the Saviour. I will not grow heavier in it, neither will I make Eliza dull, on the contrary we will support each other and in a holy competition, with the help of the Lord, we will fly along His way.»

While they are speaking some old and new disciples arrive from the camp of the Galileans, from the town, from houses spread along the slopes of the Mount, from the hamlet or suburb, whichever it may be, just outside the town, on one of the two roads that from Jerusalem go to Bethany, and precisely on the longer one, which Jesus seldom takes. The last to arrive are Philip with his family, Thomas all alone and Bartholomew with his wife.

«Where are the sons of Alphaeus, Simon and Matthew?» asks Thomas not seeing them.

«They have gone ahead. The last two to Bethany, to tell the sisters to be at Johanna's house in the afternoon. The first two have gone to Johanna and Annaleah, to tell Johanna that I will be at her house this afternoon. We will meet at the third hour at the Golden Gate. In the meantime let us go and give alms to beggars and lepers. Let Bartholomew and Andrew go ahead and buy foodstuffs for them. We will follow them slowly and will stop at the suburb of Ophel, near the Gate, and later we will go to the poor lepers.»

«All of us?» ask some, who are not very enthusiastic.

«All the disciples and all the women disciples. Passover has got us all together, as it was never possible before. Let us do together what will be future duties of men and women operating in My Name. Here is Judas of Simon coming in a hurry. I am glad because want him to be with us as well.»

In fact Judas arrives panting. «Am I late, Master? It's my mother's fault. Contrary to her habit and to what I told her, she came. I found her yesterday evening in the house of a friend of ours. And this morning she kept me conversing... She wanted to come with me. But I did not let her come.»

«Why not? Does Mary of Simon perhaps not deserve to be where you are? She deserves so much more than you do. So run and get her and join us at the Temple, at the Golden Gate.»

Judas goes away without objecting. Jesus sets out, He is ahead with His apostles and disciples. The women, with Mary in the middle, are behind the men.

367. The Thursday before Passover. At the Temple.**24th January 1946.**

I do not see food being distributed to the lepers of Hinnom, I only hear the apostles speak of them. But I do not think that any miracle has been worked among them, because Simon Peter says: «Cruel solitude has prevented them from believing and realising where Health is.»

They then enter the town through the Gate leading to the noisy populated suburb of Ophel.

After a few steps, Annaleah runs out joyfully from a half-open door and venerates the Master saying: «My mother has given me permission to stay with You, Lord, until evening.»

«Will Samuel not be disappointed?»

«There is no Samuel in my life any longer, Lord. And may the Most High be thanked for that. May He grant me, however, that Samuel may not leave You, my God, as he left me.» A smile appears heroically on her young lips, while tears shine in her chaste eyes.

Jesus looks steadily at her and as a reply, He simply says: «Join the women disciples» and He resumes walking.

But Annaleah's old mother, who is older more because of her sorrows than because of her age, approaches Jesus too, stooping in a venerable but dispirited salutation, and she says: «Peace to You, Master. When can I speak to You? I am so worried!...»

«At once, woman.» And addressing those who are with Him, He says: «Remain here outside. I am going into this house for a moment» and He is about to follow the woman.

But Annaleah calls Him from the group of the women disciples, with one word only: «Master!», but how meaningful it is! And in uttering it she joins her hands, as if she were imploring...

«Be not afraid. Be in peace. Your case is in My hands and so is your secret» replies Jesus reassuringly. He then goes in quickly through the half-open door.

Outside both men and women comment curiously on the event, as they are all anxious to know...

Inside Jesus is listening to the old woman. Leaning with His back against the door, which He Himself has closed after entering, with arms folded on His chest, He is listening to the weeping mother, who informs Him of the inconsistency of her daughter's fiancé, who has seized an opportunity to release himself completely from his bond... «So that Annaleah is as good as repudiated, and she will never get married now, because she stated that You do not approve of people getting married after being repudiated. But it is not so. She is still a girl! She is not giving herself to another man, because she has not been of any man. And he is guilty of cruelty. And even more. Because he wants to get married to another woman and my daughter will be considered the guilty one and the world will laugh at her. See to it, Lord, because all this is happening because of You.»

«Because of Me, woman? In what have I sinned?»

«Oh! You have not sinned. But he says that Annaleah is in love with You. And he feigns jealousy. He came here last night, but she was with You. He flew into a passion and swore that he would not marry her any more and Annaleah who arrived just then, replied to him: “You are doing the right thing. I am only sorry that you are clothing the truth with falsehood and slander. You know that one loves Jesus only with one's soul. But it is your soul that is now corrupt and is leaving the Light to follow the flesh, whilst I am leaving the flesh to follow the Light. We can no longer be of one mind as a married couple ought to be. You may go then, and may God watch over you.” She did not shed one tear, see? Nothing that would touch the man's heart! My expectations are disappointed! She... is causing her own ruin, through frivolity. Call her, Lord and speak to her. Make her reason. Look for Samuel. He is staying with Abraham, his relative, at the third house after the Fountain of the fig-tree. Help me! But speak to her first, just now...»

«As far as speaking is concerned, I will speak to her. But you ought to thank the Lord Who is undoing a human tie, which was not promising anything good. The man is inconstant and unjust towards God and towards his woman...»

«Yes, but it is dreadful that the world should consider her guilty and You as well, only because she is Your disciple.»

«The world accuses and then forgets. Heaven instead is eternal. Your daughter will be a flower of Heaven.»

«Why did You make her live then? She would have been a flower without being lashed with slander. Oh! As You are God, call her, make her reason and then

make Samuel consider...»

«Remember, woman, that not even God can crush the will and freedom of man. Samuel and your daughter are entitled to follow what they feel is good for them. Annaleah in particular is entitled...»

«Why?»

«Because she is loved by God more than Samuel is. Because she loves God more than she loves Samuel. Your daughter belongs to God!»

«No. That does not apply in Israel. A woman must get married... She is my daughter... Her wedding was giving me peace for the future...»

«Your daughter would have been in her grave for one year if I had not cured her. Who am I, according to you?»

«The Master and God.»

«And as God and Master I tell you that the Most High is entitled to His children more than anybody else, and that much is about to change in Religion and that from now on it will be possible for virgins to remain such forever, out of love for God. Do not weep, mother. Leave your house and come with us, today. Come! My Mother is out there with other heroic mothers who have given their children to the Lord. Join them...»

«Speak to Annaleah... Try, Lord!» moans the woman sobbing.

«All right. I will do as you wish» says Jesus. And He opens the door and calls: «Mother, come in with Annaleah.»

They go in at once.

«My child, your mother wants Me to tell you to reconsider the matter. She wants Me to speak to Samuel. What shall I do? What is your opinion?»

«You may speak to Samuel. Nay, I implore You to do so. But only because I would like him to become just upon hearing You. As far as I am concerned, You know. I beg You to give my mother the most truthful reply.»

«Have you heard, woman?»

«So which is the reply?» asks in a broken voice the old woman, who at the first words of her daughter had hoped in her repentance, but then she realised that that was not the case.

«The reply is that for one year your daughter has belonged to God and her vow will last as long as her life.»

«Oh! poor me! Which mother is more unhappy than I am?!»

Mary lets go the hand of the girl to take the woman in Her arms saying to her kindly: «Do not sin with your thought and Your tongue. It is not unhappiness, but great glory to give a child to God. You told Me one day that you were sorry that you had but one daughter, because you would have loved to have a son sacred to the Lord. You do not have a son, but an angel who will precede the Saviour in His triumph. And you say that you are unhappy? My mother spontaneously consecrated Me to the Lord from the first moment she perceived Me in her womb, having conceived Me at an old age. And she had Me for three years only. And I had her but in My heart. And yet it gave her peace, at the moment of her death, that she had given Me to the Lord... Be good now... come to the Temple to sing the praise of Him Who loves you so much as to choose your daughter as His bride. Let your heart be really wise. And true wisdom consists in putting no limitations to our generosity towards the Lord.»

The woman no longer weeps. She listens... She then makes up her mind. She takes her mantle and envelops herself in it. But passing in front of her daughter she says with a sigh: «First your disease, then the Lord... Ah! I was not to have you!...»

«No, mother. Don't say that! You never had me as you do now. Both you and God. God and you. You two only... till my death...» and she embraces her kindly saying: «Your blessing, mother! Your blessing... because I have suffered so much having to make you suffer. But God wanted me thus...»

They kiss each other, weeping. They then go out preceded by Jesus and Mary and they close the door and join the women disciples...

... «Why are we going in here, Lord? Was it not better to go in on the other side?» asks James of Zebedee.

«Because, on entering here, we shall pass in front of the Antonia.»

«And You hope... Be careful, Master!... The Sanhedrin is spying upon You» says Thomas.

«How do you know?» Bartholomew asks him.

«It is sufficient to consider how anxious the Pharisees are to understand. I am

told that they come continuously with many pretexts to watch what we do!... Why, if not to find fault with the Master?»

«You are right. So don't let us pass by the Antonia, Master. If the Romans do not see You, so much the better.»

«And the reason for that is not so much your concern for Me as your disgust for them, is that right, Bartolomai? How wise you would be if you removed such meanness from your heart!» replies Jesus, Who, however, proceeds on His way, without listening to anybody.

To go to the Antonia, they must pass through the Sixtus where the buildings of Johanna and Herod are, one close to the other. And Jonathan is at the door of Chuza's building and as soon as he sees Jesus, he informs the people in the house. Chuza comes out at once and bows to Jesus. Johanna follows him, and she is ready to join the group of the women disciples.

Chuza says: «I heard that You will be staying with us today. Grant Your servant to have You as his guest at a dinner-party.»

«Yes. Providing you will allow Me to make it a charity dinner-party for poor and unhappy people.»

«As You wish, my Lord. Give me Your orders and I will do what You wish.»

«Thank you. Peace be with you, Chuza.»

Johanna asks: «Have You any instructions for Jonathan? He is at Your disposal.»

«I will let him have them after I have been to the Temple. Let us go, because they are waiting for us.»

Shortly afterwards they pass by the beautiful palace of cruel Herod. But it is closed, as if no one lived in it. They pass near the Antonia. The soldiers watch the little procession of the Nazarene.

They go into the Temple; while the women stop in the lower part, the men proceed to the place allocated to them. They thus reach the place where children are presented and women are purified. There is a little group of people with a young mother, watching the ceremony of the rite.

«A little child sacred to the Lord, Master!» says Andrew watching the scene.

«If I am not mistaken, she is the woman from Caesarea Philippi, the woman of the castle. She passed in front of me while we were waiting for You at the Golden Gate» says James of Alphaeus.

«Yes. And her mother-in-law and Philip's superintendent are there, too. They did not see us. But we saw them» adds Thaddeus.

And Mattheus says: «Instead we saw Mary of Simon with an old man. But Judas was not there. The woman looked very sad. She looked around worriedly.»

«We will look for her later. Let us pray now. And you, Simon of Jonah, make the offer at the treasury on behalf of everybody.»

They pray for a long time, while people watch them and point the Master out to one another.

A short dispute, in which the shrill voice of a woman stands out, makes those who are not engrossed in prayer turn their heads round.

«If I came here to offer my son to God, I can remain a little longer to offer him to Him Who saved him for the Lord» says the shrill voice.

And nasal voices of men insist: «Women are not allowed to stop here after the rite. Go away.»

«I will, but after Him.»

«Call Him, then, and go away with Him.»

«Just a moment! Let the woman speak and explain how she can say that the Nazarene saved the child for God» says the drawling voice of a man.

«What does it matter, Jonathan of Uziel?»

«What does it matter!? There is certainly another sin here. Fresh evidence. Listen to me, woman. How did that man save your son? Will you tell us, the persevering seekers of truth?» asks mellifluously this Pharisee, who is not new to me.

«I certainly will, and with gratitude. I was in despair because the baby was born dead. I am a widow and this child is everything to me. He came and brought him back to life.»

«When? Where?»

«At Caesarea Philippi. I come from the castle of Caesarea.»

«Back to life! It was probably only a fainting-fit on the part of the child...»

«No. He was dead. My mother can tell you. And the superintendent of the castle can tell you as well. The Nazarene came and breathed into his mouth and the baby seethed and cried.»

«And where were you?»

«In bed, sir. I had just given birth to the child.»

«Oh, how horrible!»

«Ah! Anathema!»

«Impure!»

«Sacrilegious!»

«See? I was right in interrogating her.»

«You are wise, Jonathan of Uziel! How did you know?»

«I know the man. I saw Him desecrate the Sabbath in my property in the plain to satisfy His hunger...»

«Let us drive Him away from here!»

«Let us report the matter to the Princes of priests.»

«No, let us ask Him whether He has purified Himself. We cannot accuse without knowing...»

«Be quiet, Eleazar. Do not soil yourself with a silly defence.»

Young Dorcas, as she is caught in the middle of so much turmoil, bursts into tears and shouts: «Oh! do not injure Him because of me!»

But some hot-headed men have reached the Lord and they imperiously say to Him: «Come here and reply to us.»

The apostles and disciples are seized with anger and fear. Jesus follows calmly and solemnly those who have called Him.

«Do You recognise this woman?» they shout pushing Him into the middle of the circle which has formed round Dorcas and pointing at her as if she were a leper.

«Yes, I do. She is a young widow and mother from Caesarea Philippi. And that is her mother-in-law. And that is the superintendent of the castle. So?»

«She is accusing You of going into her room while she was still being delivered of her child.»

«That is not true, Lord! I did not say that. I said that You revived my son. And nothing else! I wanted to honour You, instead I am injuring You. Oh! Forgive me!»

Philip's superintendent intervenes to help her and he says: «It is not true. You are lying. The woman did not say that and I am witness to it, and I am ready to swear to it, and also that the Rabbi did not go into the room, but He worked the miracle standing at the door.»

«You be silent, you servant.»

«No. I will not. And I will tell Philip who respects the Rabbi more than you do, you false devotees of the Most High God.»

The subject of the dispute changes from the woman to politics and religion. Jesus is silent. Dorcas is weeping.

Eleazar, the honest guest at the banquet in the house of Ishmael, says: «I think that the doubt has been cleared and that the charge no longer stands, thus the Rabbi is free to go.»

«No. I want to know whether He has purified Himself after touching the corpse. Let Him swear to it on Jehovah!» shouts Jonathan of Uziel.

«I did not purify Myself because the child was not dead, it had difficulty only in breathing.»

«Ah! It now suits You to say that he was not revived, eh?» shouts another Pharisee.

«Why do You not boast about it as You did at Kedesh?» asks another one.

«Don't let us waste time! Let us drive Him away and take the new charge to the Sanhedrin. A bunch of charges!»

«Which are the others?» asks Jesus.

«Which? That You touched the woman-leper and did not purify Yourself. Can You deny it? That You swore at Capernaum, so much so that Your more honest disciples abandoned You. Can You deny it?»

«I deny nothing. But I am without sin, because you, Sadoc, who are now

accusing Me, were told by Anastasica's husband that she is not a leper, and you know, you matchmaker of Samuel's adultery, and you lied before the world with him, to foster the lust of the filthy man, calling leprosy what was not such and condemning a woman to the torture of being called a "leper" in Israel, only because you are the accomplice of her guilty husband.»

Sadoc, the scribe, one of those who were at Giscala and later at Kedesh, is struck home by Jesus' statements and slips away without any further remark, while the crowds shout at him mockingly.

«Be silent! This place is sacred» says Jesus. And He says to the woman and to those who are with her: «Let us go. Come with Me where they are waiting for Me.» And He sets out gravely and stately, followed by His disciples.

The woman, who in the meantime is questioned by many people, tells her story, repeating each time: «My son belongs to Him and I will consecrate him to Him.»

The superintendent, instead, approaches Jesus and says: «Master, I informed Philip of the miracle. He sent me to inform You that he likes You. Bear it in mind with regard to the snares of Herod... and of other people. But he would like to hear You, too, and see You. Would You come to His house today? He would be happy to welcome You, also in the Tetrarchy.»

«I am neither a histrion nor a wizard. I am the Master of Truth. Let him come to the Truth and I will not reject him.»

They are in the Women's Court. «Here He is!» exclaim the women disciples informing Mary who is anxious about the delay.

They all gather together and Jesus would like to dismiss the people from Caesarea to go and look for Mary, Judas' mother, but Dorcas kneels down and says: «I have been looking for You before this woman, whom You want to find, and who is the mother of one of Your disciples. I was looking for You to say to You: "This son is Yours. He is my only son and I consecrate him to You. You are the Living God. Accept him as Your servant."»

«Do you know what that means? It means that you are consecrating your son to sorrow, that you will lose him as a mother and you will gain him back as a martyr in Heaven. Do you feel you can be a martyr through your child?»

«Yes, my Lord. I would have been a martyr through his death, and I would have

suffered the martyrdom of a poor mother. For Your sake I will be a more perfect martyr, pleasing to the Lord.»

«Let it be so!... Oh! Mary of Simon, when did you come?»

«Just now. With my relative Ananias... I was looking for You, too, Lord...»

«I know. I sent Judas to tell you to come. Did he not come?»

Judas' mother lowers her head and whispers: «I left the house immediately after him and I went to Gethsemane. But You had already gone away from there!... I ran to the Temple... And now I have found You... In time to hear this girl, who is already a mother and so happy!... Oh! I wish I could speak to You as she did, Lord, of a newly-born Judas... so meek... like one of these little lambs...» and weeping she points at the bleating lambs that are going to be sacrificed. She envelops herself in her mantle to conceal her tears.

«Come with Me, mother. We will talk in Johanna's house. This is not the right place.»

The women disciples take Judas' mother into the middle of their group, while her relative Ananias mixes with the disciples. Dorcas and her mother-in-law also go with the women disciples, and Mary of Alphaeus and Salome are enraptured while fondling the child.

They go towards the exit. But before they arrive there, a Roman slave brings a waxed tablet to Johanna, who reads it and replies: «Say that it is all right. This afternoon in my house.»

Then it is the joyful cry of Jaia and his mother when they see the Saviour: «Here He is, here is the Giver of light! May You be blessed, Light of God!» and they prostrate themselves, beaming with happiness. People gather, wonder, understand, praise.

Then there is old Matthias, the man who gave Jesus and His disciples hospitality in the stormy night near Jabesh-Gilead, and he venerates and blesses the Master.

And there is Marjiam's grandfather and the other peasants, to whom Jesus says, after speaking to Johanna: «Come with Me» as He already said to Dorcas, Jaia and Matthias.

But near the Golden Gate they meet Mark of Josiah, the faithless disciple, who is speaking animatedly to Judas Iscariot. Judas sees the Master coming and he

tells his companion, who turns round when Jesus is already behind him. Their eyes meet. What a glance Jesus casts at him! But he is now deaf to all holy power. In order to run away at once, he almost pushes Jesus against a column. And Jesus reacts only by saying: «Mark, stop. Have mercy on your soul and on your mother!»

«Satan!» shouts the other. And he goes away.

«How horrible!» shout the disciples. «Curse him, Lord!» and the Iscariot is the first to say so.

«No. I would no longer be Jesus, if I did... Let us go.»

«But how has he become like that? He was so good!» says Isaac, who is so depressed by Mark's change, that he looks as if he were pierced by an arrow.

«It's a mystery. It cannot be explained!» say many of them.

And Judas of Kerioth says: «I made him speak. Everything he said was heresy, but he said things in such a way that he almost convinced you. He was not so wise when he was a just man.»

«You should say that he was not so foolish when he was possessed near Gamala!» says James of Zebedee.

And John asks: «Why, Lord, did he not injure You so much when, he was possessed? Could You not cure him so that he may not injure You?»

«Because *he has now accepted an intelligent demon in himself*. Formerly he was the abode of a legion of demons, who had occupied it through violence. But *he did not consent to having them*. Now his intelligence wanted Satan and Satan has placed an intelligent demoniacal strength in him. And I can do nothing against this latter possession. *I would have to do violence to the free will of man.*»

«Does it grieve You, Master?!»

«Yes, it does. It is My anguish... My defeat... And it distresses Me, because *such souls are lost*. Only because of that. Not because of the harm they do Me.»

They are now all standing in one group, waiting for the road to be cleared of a jam of people and mounts. And Judas' mother looks at her son so intently that the latter asks her: «Well? What is the matter with you? Is it the first time you see my face? You are really ill and I must have you treated...»

«I am not ill, son! And it is not the first time that I see you!»

«So?»

«So... nothing. I only wish you did not deserve such words of the Master.»

«I am not forsaking Him and I am not accusing Him. I am His apostle!»

They resume walking until Jesus stops to greet Johanna and the women disciples who are going to Johanna's house with her. All the men, instead, go to Gethsemane.

«We could have all gone there. I would have liked to hear what Eliza says.»

«You will see her. Because only today she will be told, and by Me, that I am entrusting Anastasica to her.»

«And is there a banquet this evening?»

«Yes, I told Johanna what to do.»

«What has she to do? When did You tell her?»

«You will see. I told her before she left us, while I was saying goodbye to her. Let us go quickly in order to be in Johanna's garden in good time.»

368. The Thursday before Passover. Instructions to the Apostles.

25th January 1946.

On their way back to Johanna's house, while they are spread out among the people crowding the streets and separating from one another the many disciples who are following Jesus, Peter, who is with the Master and the two sons of Alphaeus, asks: «Lord, now that we can speak a little to each other, will You tell me something, about which I have been thinking since last night?»

«Of course, Simon. Tell Me, and I will answer you.»

«Since last night I have been thinking of the great grace that You grant John at Antigonea. You know, it's really a great grace! Something unique. Granted to him only! And yet Syntyche also deserves as much... And there are many good

people... who would deserve to see You... but they only see You when they are close to You. For instance, what a comfort it would have been to us, when You sent us out into the world! And there have been times when a word of Yours would have cleared up doubtful points for us... But You never appear to us... Why this difference?»

«In conclusion, My dear Simon, are you perhaps a little jealous?...»

«No! But... Well, I would like to know three things: why is it granted to John of Endor; whether it is granted to him only; and whether one day it should happen to us as well, for instance to me, to see You miraculously and be informed by You how I should behave.»

«And this is My reply. The grace is granted to John because he is a most willing spirit, but he, because of his past adventures, has some weaknesses, which are more physical than anything else, and might spoil the edifice of his elevation to God, which he built. See, My dear friend? Our past, which has been upon us for a long time like a deeply rooted crust, not only cuts indelible signs, *but leaves also everlasting inclinations in every man*. Look, for instance, at that little house built at the foot of the mountain. The water, which runs down the mountain side when it rains, has slowly penetrated into it. At present there is warm sunshine, which will last for months. But the mould that has penetrated the mortar will always be present like blotches of leprosy. The house has been abandoned because it has been declared infected. In more severe days the house would have been demolished completely, according to the Law. Why did such a disaster happen to the poor house? Because its owners did not have little ditches dug around it to prevent water from stagnating at its foundations and to keep away from the side facing the mountain the water descending from it. The house is now not only ugly looking, but it is also undermined by dampness. If a man with good will saw to those expedients and then cleaned it, scraping the walls and replacing the infected bricks with new ones, it could be used once again. But it would always be affected by such weaknesses, that in the event of an earthquake it would be the first to collapse. John was penetrated for years by the poisonous evil of the world. Through his will power he had it cut off from his soul, when it became alive again. But there are weaknesses still left, hidden in his flesh, in his inferior part... His spirit is strong, but his body is weak and the flesh causes storms when its incentives link up with elements of the world, capable of shaking one's ego. John!... How many particles of his past have been removed by what happened! I help his resistance, his purification, his victory over his

resurgent past. I give solace to his too bitter suffering, as best I can. Because *he deserves it*. Because *it is just to help a holy will when all the wickedness of the world attacks it*. Are you convinced?»

«Yes, Master, I am... And do You appear to him only?»

Jesus smiles looking at Peter who is gazing at Him from below like a child watching the face of his father. He replies: «Not to him only. To others also, who are far away, building up their holiness, laboriously and all alone.»

«Who are they?»

«There is no need to know that.»

James of Alphaeus asks: «And what about us, for instance, when we shall be alone and, who knows, how we shall be tortured by the world?... Will You not help us with Your presence?»

«You will have the Paraclete with His light.»

«All right... But I... I do not know Him... and... I think that I will never succeed in understanding Him. You instead... I will say: “Oh! Here is the Master” and I will ask You what I must do, knowing for sure that it is You...» says Peter. And he concludes: «The Paraclete! Too high for a poor fisherman! I wonder how difficult His language is and how light He is: a passing whiff... Who will perceive it? I need a violent shaking, a shout, so that, blockheaded as I am, I may awake and understand. But if You appear to me, I will see You, so!... Promise me, nay, promise us, promise that You will appear to us, too. But as You are! In flesh and blood. So that one may see You well and hear You better.»

«And if I came to reproach you?»

«It does not matter! At least – you two agree, don't you? – we shall at least know what is to be done!»

Alphaeus' two sons nod assent.

«Well, I do promise you. However, believe Me, *the Paraclete will make Himself understood by your souls*. But I will come and say to you: “James, do this and that. Simon Peter, it is not right for you to do that. Judas, fortify yourself to be ready for this or that.”»

«Oh! very good. I feel better now. And come often, mind You! Because I shall

be like a poor lost child, who does nothing but weep and... do the wrong thing...» And Peter almost begins to weep now...

Judas Thaddeus asks: «Could You not do so for everybody, even now? I mean: for those who are doubtful, guilty, abjurers. Perhaps a miracle...»

«No, brother. A miracle does a lot of good, particularly that kind of miracle, *when it is granted at the right time and in the right place*, to people who are not mischievously guilty. When, instead, it is granted to people mischievously guilty, *it increases their guilt, because it increases their pride*. They mistake the gift of God for weakness of God, as if God implored such proud people to allow Him to love them. They consider the gift of God the result of their great merits. They say: “God humbles Himself before me, because I am holy.” Then the ruin is complete. The ruin of Mark of Josiah, for instance, and of other people with him... Woe to those who take that Satanic road. *The gift of God changes in them into poison of Satan*. To be blessed with unusual gifts is the greatest and safest test of the degree of elevation and holy will in man. Very often man becomes humanly exhilarated with them, and from spiritual he becomes entirely human, he then descends lower and becomes a demon.»

«Why does God grant them then? It would be better if He did not!»

«Simon of Jonah, when your mother wanted you to learn to walk, did she keep you in swaddling-clothes and in her arms all the time?»

«No. She put me on the floor with my legs free.»

«Did you ever fall?»

«Innumerable times! Also because I was very... Well, since I was a child, I wanted to do things by myself and I maintained that I did everything well.»

«But you no longer fall now!»

«Of course not! Now I know that it is dangerous to climb on the back of a chair, that it is wrong to make use of rain-pipes to descend from the roof to the ground and that it would be foolish to try to fly from the fig-tree into the house, just like a bird. But when a child, I did not know. And if I did not get killed it is a real mystery. But little by little I learned to make the right use of my legs and also of my brains.»

«So God did a good thing in giving you legs and brains, and your mother also did a good thing in letting you learn at your own expense?»

«Most certainly!»

«And God does likewise with souls. He gives them gifts, and like a good mother He warns and teaches them. But then everybody must consider by himself how to use them.»

«And if one is a blockhead?»

«God does not give gifts to blockheads. He loves them, because they are unhappy, but He does not give them what they could not appreciate.»

«But supposing He did give them, and they used them wrongly?»

«God would treat them for what they are: disabled people, and consequently not responsible. He would not judge them.»

«And if one is intelligent when one receives them, and later becomes silly or mad?»

«If the change is due to disease, one is not guilty of not using the gift.»

«But... one of us, for instance? Mark of Josiah... or... somebody else, then?»

«Oh! In that case it would be better for him not to be born! But that is how the good are separated from the wicked... A painful but just operation.»

«Which is the interesting subject of your conversation? Does it not concern us?» ask the other apostles who, thanks to the width of the street, have been able to join Jesus.

«We were speaking of many things. Jesus told me a parable on the leprosy of houses. I will repeat it to you later» replies Peter.

«What superstition, however! Really worthy of those days. Walls are not affected by leprosy. Foolish ancient people applied animal characteristics to clothes and walls. Absurd theories which make us ridiculous» remarks the Iscariot displaying his learning.

«Not quite as you say, Judas. Under an apparent fiction, suited to the mentality of those days, they achieved an important scope, which corresponded to holy foresight. Just like many other precepts of old Israel. Precepts safeguarding the health of the people. It is the duty of legislators to keep people healthy, it honours and serves God because people are creatures of God. Therefore they are not to be neglected, as we do not neglect animals and plants. It is true that the

houses that are called leprous, do not have the physical disease of leprosy. But they have position and construction faults, which make them unhealthy and are revealed by stains called “leprosy of the walls”. In the long run they are not only unhealthy for man, but they become dangerous because they can easily fall. Thus the Law prescribes what is right and orders the houses to be abandoned and restored and even to be pulled down, if after being repaired, they still show signs of the disease.»

«Oh! What harm can a little dampness do? It can be dried with braziers.»

«Then the dampness will not show exteriorly and the deception is greater. The dampness will grow in depth and corrode, and one fine day the house collapses burying those who are in it. Judas, Judas! It is better to be exceedingly watchful than imprudent.»

«I am not a house.»

«You are the house of your soul. Do not let evil filter into your house and crush it to pieces... Watch over the safety of your soul. You must all be watchful.»

«I will watch, Master. But tell me the truth, have my mother's words made a deep impression on You? She is ill. She imagines things. I must have her treated. Cure her for me, Master.»

«I will comfort her. But you are the only one who can cure her, relieving her anxiety.»

«She is anxious about nothing. Believe me, Lord.»

«Better so, Judas. Better so. But try to remove her anxiety completely, through a more and more just behaviour. If it is there, there must be a reason for it. Cancel the very memory of it, and your mother and I will bless you.»

«Master, are You afraid that I should come to terms with Mark of Josiah?»

«I am afraid of nothing.»

«Ah! Good! Because I was really trying to convince him. And I think it was my duty to do so. No one does it! But I am zealous for souls, I really am!»

«Be careful that no harm befalls you» says Peter, good-naturedly.

«What do you mean?» asks Judas aggressively.

«Just this: to handle what is burning you must use something which is

fireproof.»

«What, in our case?»

«What? Great holiness.»

«And I have none, have I?»

«Neither you, nor I, nor anyone among us. So... we might burn ourselves and be left with scorch marks.»

«So, who will take care of souls?»

«The Master, for the time being. Later, when we have the means to do so, according to His promise, we will.»

«But I want to do so now. One never works too early for the Lord.»

«Yes, I think that you are right. But *the first work for the Lord is to be done within ourselves*. To go preaching holiness to other people before preaching it to ourselves, is...»

«You are selfish.»

«Not at all.»

«Yes, you are.»

«No, I'm not.»

The dispute begins. Jesus intervenes: «Most of what Peter says is right. There is also some truth in what you say. Because *preaching is to be based on facts*. So you must sanctify yourselves in order to be able to say: “Do what I do because it is right.” And that corroborates what Peter says. *But to work on other souls also helps to perfect our own*, because we are compelled to improve ourselves, lest those to be converted should criticise us. But here we are at Johanna's house... Let us go in and enjoy being among workers of the Lord, and preach, through facts, future times.»

369. The Thursday before Passover. In Johanna of Chuza's House.**26th January 1946.**

«Peace to this house and all the people in it» is the salutation from Jesus as He enters the magnificent wide entrance-hall, all lit up, notwithstanding it is daytime. And the lamps are not unnecessary. Because while it is true that it is daytime and that the sun is dazzling outside, in the streets, and on the whitewashed facades, it is also true that in here the light must be normally dim. In fact the entrance-hall is like a corridor, the length of the house, running from the massive front door to the garden, the greenery of which can be seen at the other end of the corridor, in the bright sunshine. And the garden looks remote, because of the play of perspective. Thus the dim light in the hall must be like a real shadow, particularly for people coming from outside, whose eyes are dazzled by the bright sunshine. Chuza has therefore arranged for the many wide embossed copper pans, fixed on the two walls of the hall at regular intervals, to be fully lit, as well as the central light, a large vessel of pink alabaster with embedded jaspers and other many-coloured precious scales, which, because of the light, coming from inside the transparent alabaster, shine like stars, casting rainbows on the deep-blue walls, on people's faces and on the cipolin floor. And tiny mobile many-coloured stars seem to alight on walls and faces, because the lamp sways gently in the draught of the long hall and thus the facets of the precious scales change position continuously.

«Peace to this house» repeats Jesus, while He proceeds, blessing incessantly servants prostrated to the floor and the guests who are astonished at being gathered in a princely palace, so close to the Master...

The guests! Jesus' idea appears now clearly. The banquet of love, which He wanted to have in the house of the good woman disciple, is a page of the Gospel put into action. There are beggars, lame, blind, old people, orphans, young widows with their little ones hanging on to their skirts or sucking the scanty milk of their undernourished mothers. Johanna's wealth has already taken care of the replacement of their ragged clothes with simple ones, which are, however, new and clean. But if their hair, which has been tidied as a providential step for cleanliness, and their clean clothes make these poor wretches, whom the servants are lining up or helping to reach their seats, look less miserable than they did, when Johanna had them brought to her house from lanes, crossroads, and cart-roads leading to Jerusalem, where their misery was either concealed shamefully or displayed in order to receive alms, there are still visible signs of

hardships on their faces, as well as diseases on their bodies, and misfortune and solitude in their eyes...

Jesus passes and blesses them. Each unhappy person receives a blessing, and if Jesus' right hand is raised to bless, His left one is lowered to caress the trembling white heads of old people or the innocent heads of children. He thus goes up and down the hall, blessing everybody, also those who come in while He is already blessing and who, being dressed in rags, hide timorously and shyly in a corner, until the servants kindly take them elsewhere, to be washed and clad with clean clothes, like those who have preceded them.

A young widow passes by with her little group of children... What a pitiful sight! The youngest is completely naked, covered by the worn veil of his mother... the bigger ones have on only what is necessary to be decent. Only the oldest son, a lean tall boy, is wearing a suit worthy of that name, but he is bare-footed.

Jesus watches the woman, then He calls her saying: «Where have you come from?»

«From the plain of Sharron, Lord. Levi has become of age... And I had to take him to the Temple... because his father is dead» and the woman weeps silently, the silent weeping of a woman who has shed too many tears.

«When did your husband die?»

«A year last Shebat. I had been pregnant for two months...» and she swallows her sobs, not to annoy Jesus, bending over her little one.

«So the baby is eight months old?»

«Yes, Lord.»

«What was your husband?»

The woman whispers something in such a low voice, that Jesus does not understand. He bends to hear her and says: «Tell Me, and do not be afraid.»

«He was a farrier in a forge... But he was very ill... he suffered from sores that festered.» And she ends in a very low voice: «He was a Roman soldier.»

«But you are an Israelite?»

«Yes, Lord. But do not reject me as unclean. That is what my brothers did when I went and implored them to have mercy on us when Cornelius died...»

«Be not afraid of that! What do you do now?»

«I work as a servant, if anyone wants me, as a gleaner, a fuller, a hemp-beater... I do anything... to feed the children. Levi will now work as a peasant... if they will take him on... because he is of mixed race.»

«Trust in the Lord!»

«If I had not trusted, I would have killed myself with all my children, Lord!»

«Go, woman. We shall meet again» and He dismisses her. Johanna in the meantime has come and she is on her knees, waiting for the Master to see her. He in fact turns round and sees her. «Peace to you, Johanna. You have obeyed Me to perfection.»

«It is my joy to obey You. But I have not been the only one to assemble the “court” that You wanted. Chuza helped me in every way and so did Martha and Mary. And Eliza, too. Some sent their servants to get what was necessary and to help my servants to gather the guests, some helped the maidservants and servants at the baths to wash “the beloved ones”, as You call them. Now, if You will allow me, I will give everybody a snack, so that they may not starve waiting for their meal.»

«Of course, do. Where are the women disciples?»

«On the upper terrace where I have prepared the tables. Have I done the right thing?»

«Yes, Johanna, you have. We shall all have peace up there.»

«Yes, that is what I thought. In any case, in none of the halls I could have laid tables for so many people... And I did not want to separate them, to avoid jealousy and suffering. Unhappy people are so sensitive and so easily upset... They are one big sore and a glance is enough to make them suffer...»

«Yes, Johanna. You have a heart full of pity and you understand. May God bless you for your sympathy. Are there many women disciples?»

«Oh! All those who are in Jerusalem!... But, Lord... perhaps I have done something wrong... I would like to speak to You privately.»

«Take Me where we can be alone.»

They go into a room, which one understands is Mary and Matthias' play-room, as there are toys scattered everywhere.

«Well, Johanna?»

«O my Lord, I have certainly been thoughtless... But I acted so spontaneously, so impetuously! Chuza has reproached me. But now... One of Plautina's slaves came to the Temple with a tablet. Plautina and her companions were asking whether they could see You. I replied: “Yes, this afternoon in my house.” And they will come... Did I do the wrong thing? Oh! Not with regard to You!... But because of the others, because of those who are all Israel... and they are not love as You are. If I made a mistake, I will see that the situation is rectified... But I am so anxious that the world, the whole world, should love You, that... that I did not consider that You alone are Perfect in the world and that too few people try to imitate You.»

«You did the right thing. Today I will preach to you through deeds. And the presence of Gentiles among the believers in Jesus Saviour will be one of the things to be done in future by those who believe in Me. Where are the children?»

«They are everywhere, Lord» replies Johanna smiling, as she is now reassured, and she concludes: «They are excited by the entertainment and are running everywhere like little happy birds.»

Jesus leaves her, He goes back into the hall, beckons to the men who were with Him, and He sets out towards the garden to go up to the wide terrace.

A joyful activity has filled the house from the underground cellars to the roof. Some people go to and fro with foodstuffs and household goods, with bundles of clothes, with chairs, accompanying guests, replying to those who ask questions, and they are all full of love and joy. Jonathan supervises, watches and advises and he is indefatigable and solemn in his office of superintendent.

Old Esther, who is happy to see Johanna so lively and healthy, is laughing in the middle of a circle of poor children, to whom she gives cakes, while telling them wonderful stories. Jesus stops a moment to listen to the magnificent conclusion of one of them, which says «that God granted much help to good Dawn of May, who never rebelled against the Lord because of the trouble that had come to her house, so that Dawn of May was the salvation and wealth also of her little

brothers. Angels used to fill her little bread-bin, and finish the work on the loom to help the good girl, saying: "She is our sister because she loves the Lord and her neighbour. She is to be helped by us."»

«May God bless you, Esther! I would almost like to stop Myself and listen to your parables! Will you let Me?» says Jesus smiling.

«Oh! My Lord! I must listen to You! But for these little ones I am good enough, although I am a poor old foolish woman!»

«Your just soul is useful also to adults. Go on, Esther, go on...» and He smiles at her while going away.

The guests are by now scattered through the large garden and are having their snack, looking around and at one another with astonishment. They speak exchanging comments on their unexpected good fortune. When they see Jesus pass by, they stand up, if they can do so, or they bow respectfully.

«Eat up, in full freedom and bless the Lord» says Jesus passing by on His way to the gardeners' rooms, where the outside staircase begins, leading to the large terrace.

«Oh! My Rabboni!» shouts the Magdalene running out of a room with her arms full of swaddling clothes and little vests for babies. Her voice is as soft as a golden organ and fills the shady avenue full of festoons of roses.

«Mary, God be with you. Where are you going in such a hurry?»

«Oh! I have ten babies to dress! I have washed them and I am now going to dress them. I will then bring them to You, as fresh as flowers. I must run, Master, because... Can You hear them? They are like ten little bleating lambs...» and she runs away laughing. She looks splendid and serene in her simple refined dress of white linen, tightened at her waist by a thin silver belt and her hair fastened in a simple knot on the nape of her neck, supported by a white ribbon, which is tied in a knot on her forehead.

«How different she is from what she was on the Mountain of Beatitudes!» exclaims Simon Zealot.

In the first flight of steps they meet Jairus' daughter and Annaleah, who are coming down so fast that they seem to be flying.

«Master!», «Lord!» they exclaim.

«God be with you. Where are you going?»

«To get some tablecloths. Johanna's handmaid sent us. Will You be speaking, Master?»

«Certainly!»

«Oh! run, then, Mirjiam! Let us be quick!» says Annaleah.

«You have all the time you need to do what you have to do. I am waiting for other people. But when did you change your name to Mirjiam?» He says looking at Jairus' daughter.

«Today. Just now. Your Mother gave me it. Because... is that right, Annaleah? This is a great day for four virgins...»

«Yes, it is! Shall we tell the Lord, or shall we let Mary tell Him?»

«Let Mary tell Him. Go, my Lord. Your Mother will tell You» and they run away nimbly, in the prime of youth; they are human in their beautiful figures, but look like angels because of their bright eyes...

On the third flight they meet Eliza of Bethzur, who is coming down, looking very serious, with Philip's wife.

«Ah! Lord!» exclaims the latter. «You give to some people, but You take away from others!... But may You be blessed just the same!»

«What are you talking about, woman?»

«You will soon know... How grievous and how glorious, Lord! You are crippling me and crowning me.»

Philip, who is close to Jesus, says: «What are you saying? What are you talking about? You are my wife and I am entitled to know what is happening...»

«Oh! You will be told, Philip. Go with the Master now.»

Jesus in the meantime asks Eliza whether she has recovered completely. And the woman, whom deep past sorrows have given the stateliness of a sorrowful queen, replies: «Yes, my Lord. But to suffer with peace in one's heart is no pang. And I now have peace in my heart.»

«And you will soon have more.»

«What, Lord?»

«Go, and when you come back you will be told.»

«Jesus is here! Jesus is here!» shout the two children, whose faces are leaning against the railings ornamented with arabesques bordering the terrace on the two sides overlooking the garden, and from which branches of roses and jasmine in bloom are hanging. It is, in fact, a large hanging garden over which a many-coloured velarium has been spread as a protection against the sunshine.

All the people on the terrace who are busy preparing the tables turn round at the shouts of Mary and Matthias, and leaving their work unfinished, they come towards Jesus, to Whose knees the two children are clinging.

Jesus greets the many women who crowd round Him. Among the true and proper disciples or wives, sisters, daughters of the apostles and disciples, there are some less known and familiar, such as the wife of His cousin Simon, the mothers of the donkey drivers of Nazareth, the mother of Abel from Bethlehem in Galilee, Anne of Judas (from the house near lake Merom), Mary of Simon the mother of Judas of Kerieth, Naomi from Ephesus, Sarah and Marcella from Bethany (Sarah is the woman whom Jesus cured on the Mountain of Beatitudes and sent to Lazarus with old Ishmael; I think she is now the handmaid of Mary of Lazarus), then there is the mother of Jaia, the mother of Philip of Arbela, Dorcas, the young mother from Caesarea Philippi and her mother-in-law, Annaleah's mother, Mary of Bozrah, the woman cured of leprosy who has come to Jerusalem with her husband, and many more whose faces are not new to me, but whose names I cannot remember.

Jesus proceeds along the large rectangular terrace, one side of which overlooks the Sixtus and He stops near the low cube-shaped room on the northern side of the terrace, where I think the internal staircase ends. The whole of Jerusalem and its surroundings are visible. It is a magnificent view. All the women disciples and the other women stop laying the tables and have gathered round Him. The servants go on with their work.

Mary is near Her Son. In the golden light filtering through the large velarium spread over most of the terrace and which becomes a delicate emerald light where it reaches faces, after filtering through entangled rose bushes and jasmines forming a pergola, She looks even younger and slimmer; a sister of the younger women disciples, just a little older and as beautiful as the most beautiful of the roses blooming in the hanging garden or in the large flower pots placed around it and containing roses, jasmines, lilies of the valley and other

delicate plants.

«Mother, my wife has spoken in a queer way!... What happened, why did she say that she is crippled and crowned at the same time?» asks Philip, who is anxious to know.

Mary smiles kindly looking at him, and although She is averse to familiarities, She takes his hand saying: «Would you be able to give My Jesus what is dearest to you? You really ought to... because He gives you Heaven and the Way to get there.»

«Of course I would, Mother... particularly if what I gave Him would make Him happy.»

«It would. Philip, your daughter also is consecrating herself to the Lord. She told Me and her mother a little while ago, in the presence of many women disciples...»

«What? You!» exclaims Philip dumbfounded pointing his finger at the gentle girl, who clings to Mary as if she wished to be protected. The apostle swallows with difficulty this second blow that deprives him for good of the hope of having grandchildren, He wipes the sudden flow of perspiration caused by the news... and looks at the people around him. He is struggling and suffering.

His daughter moans: «Father... forgive me... and bless me» and she throws herself at his feet.

Philip caresses her brown hair mechanically and clears his throat. At last he speaks: «One forgives children who commit sins... By consecrating yourself to the Master you are not committing a sin... and your poor father can but say to you: "May you be blessed"... Ah! my daughter!... How sweet and terrible is the will of God!» and he bends, lifts his daughter, embraces her, kissing her forehead and hair. He then moves towards Jesus and says to Him: «Here. I am her father. But You are her God! Your right is stronger than mine... Thank You, Lord, for... for the joy that...» and he cannot go on... He kneels at Jesus' feet and bends to kiss them moaning: «No grandchildren... never... My dream!... The smile of my old age!... Forgive my tears, my Lord... I am a poor man...»

«Stand up, My dear friend. And be happy because you are giving the early flowers to the angelical flowerbeds. Come. Come here, between Me and My Mother. Let us hear from Her how this happened, because I can assure you that I am neither to be blamed or praised for it.»

Mary explains: «I know very little Myself. We women were speaking to one another, and as often is the case, they were asking Me about My virginal vow. They were also asking Me what future virgins will be like, which work and which glory I foresaw for them. And I was replying as best I could... And I foresaw for them a life of prayer and of relief to the suffering caused to My Jesus by the world. I said: “It will be the virgins who will support the apostles and will purify the foul world, clothing and scenting it with their purity; they will be the angels singing praises to cover up the blasphemy of the world. And Jesus will be happy, and will grant graces to the world and will have mercy on it, thanks to these lambs spread among wolves...” and I was saying other things.

Jairus' daughter then said to Me: “Give me a name, Mother, for my future as a virgin, because I cannot allow any man to have pleasure out of my body, which was revived by Jesus. This body of mine belongs to Him only until its flesh will be in the grave and its soul in Heaven”, and Annaleah said: “That is what I also felt I should do. And now I feel happier than a swallow, because all ties are broken.” It was then that your daughter, Philip, said: “I will be like you, too: a virgin forever!” Her mother – there she is coming – pointed out to her that one cannot take such a decision just like that. But she would not change her mind. And when she was asked whether it was an old idea she had, she replied “no” and to those who asked how she got it, she said: “I do not know. It was as if a beam of light had pierced my heart and I understood of what love I love Jesus.”»

Philip's wife asks him: «Have you heard that?»

«Yes, woman. Our flesh moans... whereas it should rejoice because this is its glorification. Our heavy flesh has procreated two angels. Do not weep, woman. You said yourself that He has crowned you... A queen does not weep when she receives her crown...»

But Philip is weeping as well, and many more, both men and women, are weeping, now that they are all gathered on the terrace. Mary of Simon has burst into unrestrained weeping in a corner. Mary of Magdala is weeping in another corner, pulling and twisting her linen dress, from which she mechanically tears off the threads trimming the hem. Anastasica is weeping and she tries to conceal her sorrowful face with her hand.

«Why are you weeping?» asks Jesus. No one replies.

Jesus calls Anastasica and asks her once again. She replies: «Because, Lord, for the nauseating pleasure of one night only, I lost the possibility of being one of

Your virgins.»

«*Every condition is good, if one serves the Lord in it.* In the future Church both virgins and matrons will be required. They are both useful for the triumph of the Kingdom of God in the world and for the work of their brother priests. Eliza of Bethzur, come here. Comfort this very young woman...» And with His own hands He places Anastasica between Eliza's arms. He watches them while Eliza caresses Anastasica, who relaxes in her motherly arms and He then asks: «Eliza, do you know her story?»

«Yes, Lord. I do. And I feel sorry for her, for she is like a dove without nest.»

«Eliza, do you love this sister?»

«Do I love her? Yes, I do, very much. But not as a sister. She could be my daughter. And now that I am holding her in my arms, I feel as if I were becoming the happy mother of days gone by. To whom are You going to entrust this gentle gazelle?»

«To you, Eliza.»

«To me?» The woman unfastens her arms to look at the Lord incredulously.

«To you. Do you not want her?»

«Oh! Lord! My Lord!»... Eliza crawls on her knees towards Jesus and she does not know what to say or how to express her joy.

«Stand up and be a holy mother to her and let her be a holy daughter to you, and may you both proceed in the way of the Lord. Mary of Lazarus, you were so cheerful a little while ago, why are you weeping now? Where are the ten flowers you were going to bring Me?...»

«They are replete with food and are sleeping in their purity, Master... And I am weeping because I shall never have the purity of virgins and my soul will weep forever, without ever being sated... because I have sinned...»

«*My forgiveness and your tears make you purer than they are.* Come here and weep no more. Leave tears to those who have something of which they are ashamed. Come on. Go and get your flowers; and you may go as well, you mothers and virgins. Go and tell the guests of God to come up here. We will have to dismiss them before the Gates close, because many of them live out in the country.»

They all obey and depart, so that on the terrace there are left only Jesus, Who is caressing Mary and Matthias, Eliza and Anastasica, who a little farther off are holding each other's hands, looking at each other, smiling and weeping for joy, Mary of Simon over whom Mary bends in pity, and Johanna, who is standing at the door of the room, looking towards Jesus in an uncertain attitude. The apostles and disciples have gone downstairs with the women to help the servants bring up the long staircase the crippled, blind, lame and old people bent with age.

Jesus raises His head, which was bent over the two children, and sees Mary stooped over Judas' mother. He gets up and goes towards them. He lays His hand on the grey head of Mary of Simon and asks: «Why are you weeping, woman?»

«Oh! Lord! I gave birth to a demon! No mother in Israel will be as grieved as I am!»

«Mary, another mother and for the same reason as yours, said to Me and still says those words. Poor mothers!...»

«Oh! My Lord, is there therefore another man, who, like my Judas, is wicked and cruel to You? Oh! It cannot be! He has You, and yet he is addicted to foul practices. Although he lives in Your atmosphere, he is lustful and a thief and he will perhaps become a homicide. He... oh! His mind is deceitful! He lives in agitation. Make him die, Lord, out of pity! Make him die!»

«Mary, your heart makes him worse than he is. Fear is driving you insane. But you must be calm and reasonable. What proof have you of his behaviour?»

«I have no proof of anything against You. But it is an avalanche which is about to fall. I caught him and he could not deny the evidence that... Here he is... For pity's sake, be quiet! He is looking at me. He suspects. He is my grief. There is no mother in Israel more unhappy than I am!...»

Mary whispers: «I am... because I add the sorrows of all unhappy mothers to My own... Because My sorrow is caused by the hatred of the whole world, not of one man only.»

Johanna calls Jesus and He goes towards her; in the meantime Judas approaches his mother, who is still being comforted by Mary, and he lashes her: «Have you been able to show your frenzy and calumniate me? Are you happy now?»

«Judas! Is that how you speak to your mother?» asks Mary severely. It is the first time I see Her thus...

«Yes. Because I am tired of her persecution.»

«Oh! My son, it is not persecution! It is love! You say that I am ill. But it is you who are ill! You say that I calumniate you and I listen to your enemies. But you are wronging yourself, because you follow and are friendly with wicked people who will ruin you. Because you are weak, son, and they are aware of your weakness... Listen to your mother. Listen to Ananias, who is old and wise. Judas! Have mercy on me! Judas!!! Where are you going, Judas?!»

Judas, who is almost running across the terrace, turns round and shouts: «Where I am useful and respected» and he rushes down the staircase, while the unhappy mother, leaning over the parapet, shouts to him: «Don't go! Don't go! They want to ruin you! Son! My son!...»

Judas has arrived downstairs where the trees prevent his mother from seeing him. He reappears for a moment in an empty space before entering the hall.

«He has gone!... Pride devours him!» moans his mother.

«Let us pray for him, Mary. Let us pray together, the two of us...» says the Blessed Virgin holding the hand of the sad mother of the future deicide.

Meanwhile the guests begin to come up... and Jesus is speaking to Johanna. «All right. Let them come. It is much better if they have put on Jewish clothes, to avoid rousing the prejudices of many people. I will wait for them here. Go and call them» and leaning against the doorpost He watches the arrival of the guests, whom apostles and disciples of both sexes kindly lead to the tables according to a pre-arranged order. In the centre there is a low table for children, parallel to which on both sides are all the other tables.

And while the blind, lame, crippled and old people bent with age, and the widows take seats, with the stories of their sorrows impressed on their faces, large baskets and small chests, which have been turned into cradles and look as pretty as flower baskets, are brought in, with the babies of poor mothers sleeping in them. And Mary of Magdala, who is now in better spirits, approaches Jesus saying: «The flowers have arrived. Come and bless them, my Lord.»

At the same time Johanna appears at the top of the inside staircase saying: «Master, here are the heathen women disciples.» They are seven women,

wearing plain dark clothes like those of Jewish women. Each has a veil over her face and a mantle reaching down to her feet. Two of them are tall and stately, the others are of middle height. But when they take their mantles off, after greeting the Master reverently, Plautina, Lydia and Valeria are easily recognised, as well as Flavia, the freedwoman who wrote Jesus' words in Lazarus' garden; then there are three strangers. One of them, who looks as if she were accustomed to giving orders, kneels down saying to the Lord: «And may Rome prostrate itself at Your feet with me.» One is a buxom matron about fifty years old. The last one is a girl who is as slim and beautiful as a wild flower.

Although the Roman ladies are dressed like Jewesses, Mary of Magdala recognises them and she whispers: «Claudia!!!» and looks at her with wide-open eyes.

«It is I. I am tired of hearing His words from other people. Truth and Wisdom are to be drawn straight from their source.»

«Do you think that they will recognise us?» Valeria asks Mary of Magdala.

«I do not think so, unless you betray your identities by calling one another by name. In any case I will put you in a safe place.»

«No, Mary. Let them be at the tables, serving the beggars. No one will think that patrician ladies are serving the poor and lowest people in the Jewish world» says Jesus.

«Your sentence is a wise one, Master. Because pride is inborn in us.»

«And humility is the clearest sign of My doctrine. Those who want to follow Me must love Truth, Purity and Humility, they must be charitable to everybody and heroic in defying the opinion of men and the violence of Tyrants. Let us go.»

«Forgive me, Rabbi. This girl is a slave and the daughter of slaves. I ransomed her because she is of Jewish extraction and Plautina is keeping her in her own house. But I wish to offer her to you, because I think that it is the right thing to do. Her name is Eglah. She belongs to You.»

«Take her, Mary. Later we will decide what to do... Thank you, woman.»

Jesus goes on the terrace to bless the children. The ladies arouse much curiosity. But dressed in almost poor garments and combed in Jewish style, they do not awaken suspicion. Jesus goes to the centre of the terrace, to the children's table and He prays, offering the food to the Lord on behalf of everybody, He blesses it

and tells them to begin eating.

The apostles, disciples, women disciples and ladies are the servants of the poor, and Jesus sets the example turning up the wide sleeves of His red tunic and looking after the children with the help of Mirjiam of Jairus and John. The mouths of so many undernourished people are very busy but their eyes are all turned towards the Lord. When it begins to get dark, the large velarium is removed and servants bring lamps, although they are not yet necessary.

Jesus moves about the tables. He encourages everybody with words and with His own help. He passes several times near the two stately ladies, Claudia and Plautina, who humbly break bread for guests who are blind, paralytic or maimed or they help them to drink wine; He smiles at His virgins who are looking after the women, and at the mother-disciples who kindly assist the unhappy people; He smiles at Mary of Magdala who is doing her very best at the table of some old men, the most sad of all the tables, as it is full of coughing and trembling people, whose toothless mouths chew food with their gums and slaver. He assists Matthew who is shaking a child, as a crumb of a cake, which he was sucking and biting with his new teeth, has gone down the wrong way. And He congratulates Chuza, who arrived at the beginning of the meal and is now carving meat and serving it like an expert waiter.

The meal is over. The more colourful faces and the brighter eyes of the poor people clearly show their satisfaction.

Jesus bends over an old trembling man and asks him: «What thought is making you smile, father?»

«I was just thinking that it is not a dream. Up to a little while ago I thought I was sleeping and dreaming. But now I feel that it is really true. But who makes You so good, that You make Your disciples so kind? Long live Jesus!» he shouts finally.

And all the voices of the poor wretches, and they are hundreds, shout: «Long live Jesus!»

Jesus goes once again towards the centre of the terrace and He opens His arms wide, beckoning to them to be quiet and still and He begins to speak, sitting down with a child on His knees.

«Yes, long live Jesus, not because I am Jesus. But because Jesus means the love of God, Who became flesh and descended among men to be known and to make

known the love that will be the sign of the new era. Long live Jesus, because Jesus means Saviour And I will save you. I will save everybody, rich and poor, children and old people, Israelites and heathens, everybody, *provided that you give Me your will to be saved*. Jesus is for everybody, not just for this one or that one. Jesus belongs to everybody. He belongs to all men and is for all men. I am merciful Love and sure Salvation. What must one do to belong to Jesus and thus be saved? Few things. But great things. Not great in the sense that they are difficult, like things accomplished by kings. They are great because they want man to put new vigour and faith into his life to do them and to belong to Jesus. Thus love, humility, faith, resignation, pity are required. Now, you disciples, what great thing have You done today? You may say: "Nothing. We served a meal." No. You have served love. You have humbled yourselves. You have treated as brothers unknown people of all races, without asking them who they are, whether they are healthy or good. And you have done that in the name of the Lord. Perhaps you were expecting great words from Me, for your education. *I made you do great things*. We began the day with prayer, we have helped lepers and beggars, we have worshipped the Most High in His House, we have begun brotherly agapes and we have taken care of pilgrims and poor people, we have served because to serve for love is to be like Me, Who am the Servant of the servants of God, a Servant to the extent of being destroyed by death in order to serve you with salvation...» Jesus is interrupted by shouting and shuffling of feet. A group of excited Israelites runs up the staircase. The Roman ladies who are best known, that is, Plautina, Claudia, Valeria and Lydia, withdraw cautiously covering their faces with their veils. The disturbers rush onto the terrace and seem to be looking for I wonder what.

Chuza, who feels offended, faces them and asks: «What do you want?»

«Nothing concerning you. We are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, not for you.»

«Here I am. Can you not see Me?» asks Jesus putting down the child and standing up imposingly.

«What are You doing here?»

«You can see yourselves. I am doing what I teach, and I teach what is to be done: to love the poor. What have you been told?»

«We heard shouts of sedition. And as there is sedition wherever You are, we came to see.»

«There is peace where I am. The shout was: "Long live Jesus"»

«Exactly. And both at the Temple and at Herod's palace they thought that people were conspiring here against...»

«Against whom? Who is the king of Israel? Neither the Temple, nor Herod. Rome rules here and whoever thinks of becoming king where Rome rules, must be mad.»

«You say that You are a king.»

«Yes, I am a king. But not of this kingdom. It is too trivial for Me! Also the Empire is too trivial. *I am the King of the Kingdom of Heaven, of the Kingdom of Love and of the Spirit*. Go in peace. Or you may stay, if you so wish, and learn how one reaches My Kingdom. Here are My subjects: *the poor, the unhappy, the oppressed; and the good, the humble, the charitable*. Stay here and join them.»

«But You always feast in splendid houses, among beautiful women and...»

«That's enough! You cannot throw out innuendos against the Rabbi and insult Him in my house. Go out!» thunders Chuza.

But the slender figure of a veiled girl jumps onto the terrace from the inside staircase. She runs as lightly as a butterfly as far as Jesus, where she drops her veil and mantle, throwing herself at His feet and trying to kiss them.

«Salome!» shouts Chuza and other people do likewise.

Jesus has withdrawn so vigorously to avoid her contact, that His seat turns over and He takes advantage of the situation to put it between Himself and Salome as a partition. His eyes are so phosphorescent and dreadful that they rouse fear in everybody.

Salome smirking impudently says: «Yes, it is I. The acclamation was heard in the Palace. Herod has sent word to tell You that he wants to see You. But I have forestalled his messenger. Come with me, Lord. I love You so much and I am so anxious to have You! I am flesh of Israel, too.»

«Go back to your house.»

«The Court is waiting for You to honour You.»

«This is My Court. I do not know any other Court or other honours» and with His hand He points at the poor people sitting at the tables.

«I have brought You gifts for it. Here are my jewels.»

«I do not want them.»

«Why are You refusing them?»

«Because they are filthy and offered for a filthy purpose. Go away!»

Salome stands up, she is dumbfounded. She casts a quick glance at the Terrible Most Pure One, Who fulminates her with His arm stretched out and eyes flashing fire. She looks furtively at everybody and sees derision or disgust on everybody's face. The Pharisees are petrified watching the potent scene. The Roman ladies dare come forward to have a better view.

Salome makes a last attempt: «You approach even lepers...» she says submissively and imploringly.

«They are diseased. You are a wanton girl. Go away!»

This last «go away!» is so powerful that Salome picks up her veil and mantle and stooping and crawling she goes towards the staircase.

«Be careful, Lord!... She is powerful... She might be harmful to You» whispers Chuza in a low voice.

But Jesus replies in a very loud voice, so that everybody, and the expelled girl first of all, may hear: «It does not matter. I would rather be killed than be allied with vice. The perspiration of a lewd woman and the gold of a prostitute are poisons of hell. A cowardly alliance with the mighty ones is sinful. I am Truth, Purity and Redemption. And I will not change. Go. Show her out.»

«I will punish the servants who let her in.»

«Do not punish anybody. One only is to be punished: the girl. And she is punished. And she should know, and you all should know that I am aware of her intentions, which make Me sick. Let the snake go back to her hole. The Lamb is going back to His gardens.»

He sits down. He is perspiring. He then says: «Johanna, give an offering to each of them, so that their life may not be so sad for a few days... What else can I do for you, o children of sorrow? What do you want Me to give you? I can read

your hearts. Peace and health to the sick ones who can believe!»

There is a short pause, then a cry... and many stand up completely cured. The Jews who had come to catch Him are amazed and in the general enthusiasm for the miracle and for Jesus' purity no one pays any attention to them, when they go away.

Jesus smiles kissing the children. He then dismisses the guests, but He holds back the widows and speaks to Johanna on their behalf. Johanna takes note and invites them for the following day. They go away, too. The last to go are the old people...

The apostles, the disciples of both sexes and the Roman ladies remain with Jesus, Who says: «That is how future meetings must be. Words are not needed. Let the evidence of facts speak to spirits and minds. Peace be with you.»

He goes towards the inside staircase and disappears followed by Johanna and the others.

At the foot of the staircase He meets Judas, who says: «Master, do not go to Gethsemane! Your enemies are looking for You there. Well, mother, what do you say now? You accuse me, but if I had not gone, I would not have found out about the snare that has been laid for the Master. Let us go to another house!»

«Come to ours, then. Only the friends of God enter Lazarus' house» says Mary of Magdala.

«Yes. Let those who were at Gethsemane yesterday come to Lazarus' house with his sisters. Tomorrow we will take the necessary measures.»

370. The Thursday before Passover. The Evening.

27th January 1946.

The followers of Jesus certainly do not stand out for their courage! The news brought by Judas has the same effect as the apparition of a hawk over a threshing-floor crowded with chicks or the presence of a wolf on the edge of a cliff close to a flock of sheep! The faces of most of them, particularly of the men, show signs of fear or at least of anxiety. I think that many of them are

under the impression that a sword or a lash is already pressing against their skin or that they will be thrown into dungeons awaiting trial and that is probably the least penalty of which they are thinking. The women are not so excited. More than anything else they are worried about their sons or husbands, whom they advise to steal away in little groups through the country.

Mary of Magdala rebels against such waves of exaggerated fear: «Oh! How many gazelles there are in Israel! Are you not ashamed of trembling thus? I told you that in my house you will be safer than in a stronghold. So come! And upon my word I can assure you that nothing will happen to you. If in addition to those mentioned by Jesus there are other people who feel that they will be safer in my house, let them come. There are enough beds for a century. Come on, make up your minds, instead of fainting with fear! I only ask Johanna to send her servants after us with foodstuffs. Because there is not enough in the house for everybody, and it is now evening. A good meal is the best cure for a faint-heart.» She is not only imposing in her white dress, but her beautiful eyes are also quite ironical and she looks down on the frightened group crowding into Johanna's hall.

«I will send them at once. You may go, Jonathan will follow you with the servants, and I will come as well, because I want to have the pleasure of following the Master, without being afraid, I can assure you, so much so, that I will bring the children with me» says Johanna. She withdraws to give the necessary instructions while the vanguard of the frightened army look cautiously out of the main door, and when they see that there is nothing to be afraid of, they dare go out into the street and set out, followed by the others.

The group of the virgins is in the centre, immediately after Jesus, who is in the first lines. The women are behind the virgins... and then the less brave ones, whose backs are protected by Mary of Lazarus, who has joined the Roman ladies, as they have decided not to part from the Master so early. Then Mary of Lazarus runs ahead to say something to her sister and the seven Roman ladies are left with Sarah and Marcella, who are also in the rearguard by order of Mary, also with a view to letting the seven Roman ladies pass unnoticed.

Johanna arrives quickly holding the children by the hand, and behind her there is Jonathan and some servants laden with bags and baskets. They bring up the rear, but no one pays attention to the little group, as the streets are crowded with people going home or to their camps and in the faint light faces are not easily recognised. Mary of Magdala is now in the first line with Johanna, Anastasica and Eliza, and she leads the guests to her house through narrow side-streets.

Jonathan is walking quite close to the Roman ladies, to whom he speaks as if they were the servants of the richest women disciples. Claudia takes advantage of the situation to say to him: «Man, please go and call the disciple who brought the news. Tell him to come here. But speak to him in such a way as not to draw the attention of other people. Go!» Her dress is a plain one, but her attitude is unintentionally imposing, typical of a person accustomed to giving orders. Jonathan opens his eyes wide, trying to see, through her lowered veil, who is the woman speaking to him thus. But he cannot see the flashing eyes of the imperious woman. He must realise that the woman who has spoken to him is not a servant, and he bows to her before departing.

He reaches Judas of Kerioth who is talking animatedly to Stephen and Timoteus, and he pulls his sleeve.

«What do you want?»

«I have something to tell you.»

«Tell me.»

«No. Come with me. You are wanted, for alms, I think...»

The excuse is a good one and it is accepted peacefully by Judas' companions and enthusiastically by Judas himself, who goes back quickly with Jonathan.

He is now at the rear line. «Woman, this is the man you wanted» says Jonathan to Claudia.

«Thank you for serving me» she replies with her veil still lowered. She then addresses Judas: «Please stop for a moment and listen to me.»

Judas, who has heard her refined way of speaking and has seen two wonderful eyes through her thin veil and perhaps feels there is the prospect of a great adventure, agrees without any objection.

The group of the Roman ladies parts. Plautina and Valeria remain with Claudia, the others go on. Claudia looks around. She sees the lonely little street in which they have stopped, and with her beautiful hand she removes her veil, uncovering her face.

Judas recognises her and after a moment's astonishment, he bows greeting her with a mixture of Jewish gestures and a Roman word: «Domina!»

«Yes, it is I. Stand up and listen. You love the Nazarene. You are anxious about

His welfare. You are right. He is a virtuous man and must be defended. We respect Him as a great just man. The Jews do not respect Him. They hate Him. I know. Listen. Understand properly what I say, remember it well and act accordingly. I want to protect Him. Not like the lewd girl of a little while ago, but honestly and virtuously. When your love and your sagacity make you understand that there is a danger for Him, come or send someone. Claudia dominates over Pontius. Claudia will obtain protection for the Just One. Is that clear?»

«Perfectly clear, domina. May our God protect you. If at all possible, I will come myself. But how can I get to you?»

«Always ask for Albula Domitilla. That is another name I use, but no one is amazed if she speaks to Jews, because she takes care of my liberality. They will think that you are a client. Will that humiliate you?»

«No, domina. It is an honour to serve the Master and have your protection.»

«Yes, I will protect you. I am a woman but I belong to the Claudi family. I am more powerful than all the mighty ones in Israel, because Rome is behind me. In the meantime take this. It's our offering for the poor of the Christ. But... I would like to remain among the disciples this evening. Arrange that for me and you will be protected by Claudia.»

The words of the patrician have a miraculous effect on a man like the Iscariot. He is in his seventh heaven!... He dares to ask her: «But will you really help Him?»

«Yes, I will. His Kingdom deserves to be established, because it is a kingdom of virtue. It is welcome, against the foul waves that cover present kingdoms and disgust me. Rome is great, but the Rabbi is by far greater than Rome. We have eagles on our banners and the proud monogram. But He will have Genii and His holy Name on His. Rome and the Earth will be really great when they put that Name on their banners, and His sign will be on standards, temples, arches and columns.»

Judas is astonished, ecstatic, in a dream. He tosses the heavy purse given to him, and does so mechanically, nodding assent all the time...

«Now let us go and join them. We are allied, are we not? Allied to protect your Master and the King of honest souls.»

She lowers her veil and nimbly runs off to reach the group ahead of her,

followed by the other ladies and by Judas, who is panting not so much because of his physical effort as for what he has heard. The last disciples are entering Lazarus' building when they reach them. They go in quickly and the heavy iron door is closed with a loud noise of latches bolted by the keeper.

A solitary lamp, held by the keeper's wife, hardly lights up the white square hall of Lazarus' house. The house is obviously uninhabited, although it is well kept and tidy. Mary and Martha lead the guests into a large room, certainly used for banquets, the walls of which are covered with precious cloths showing their arabesque decorations as chandeliers are lit and lamps are placed on sideboards, on precious chests laid around the walls, or on the tables, which are on one side, ready to be used, but which have not been used for a long time. Mary orders them to be brought to the centre of the room and laid for supper with the foodstuff that Johanna's servants are taking out of bags and baskets and putting on the sideboards.

Judas takes Peter to one side and whispers something in his ear,

I see Peter open his eyes wide and shake his hand as if he had burned his fingers, while he exclaims: «By thunders! What are you saying?»

«Yes, look. Just imagine! We no longer need be afraid! There is no longer any reason to be so depressed!»

«But that's too much! But what did she say? That she will really protect us? May God bless her! But which one is she?»

«The tall slender one, wearing a turtle-dove dress. She is looking at us...» Peter looks at the tall woman, whose face is regular and grave, and whose eyes are kind but imperious.

«And... how did you manage to speak to her? Did you not feel...»

«No, not at all.»

«And yet you hated their contact! Like me, like everybody...»

«Yes, but I overcame that feeling for the Master's sake. As I overcame my desire to part company with my old companions of the Temple... Oh! Everything for the Master! My mother and you all think that I am shady. You recently blamed me for the friends I have. But if I did not cultivate their friendship, which is very painful to me, I would not learn many things. There is no sense in closing our eyes or sealing our ears with wax lest the world should come into us through our

eyes or ears. When one is in an enterprise like ours, one's eyes and ears must be absolutely free and watchful. We must watch over Him, His wealth, His mission, and the foundation of this blessed kingdom...»

Many of the apostles and some disciples have approached them and are listening, nodding assent. In fact no one can say that Judas is wrong in what he is saying!

Peter, being honest and humble, admits it and says: «You are quite right! Forgive me for my reproaches. You are worth more than I am and you know what to do. Oh! Let us go and tell the Master, His Mother and yours! She was so worried!»

«Because evil tongues have hinted... But be silent for the time being. Later... See? They are sitting at the table and the Master is beckoning to us to go...»

... It is a quick meal. Also the Roman ladies, sitting at the table of the women and mixed with them, so that Claudia is between Porphyrea and Dorcas, are eating in silence what is put before them. They exchange mysterious smiles and meaningful nods with Johanna and Mary of Magdala. They look like school-children on holiday.

When supper is over Jesus tells them to form a square with their seats and sit down in order to listen to Him. He places Himself in the centre and begins to speak in the middle of a square of attentive faces, where only the little innocent eyes of Dorcas' baby, who is sleeping in his mother's lap, are closed, while the eyes of Mary, sat on Johanna's knees, and those of Matthias, cuddled on Jonathan's, are becoming heavy with sleep.

«O disciples gathered here in the Name of the Lord, or attracted here by the desire of Truth, a desire that still comes from God, Who wants light and truth to be in all hearts, listen.

This evening we have been allowed to be all together, and this has been caused by wicked people who want us to be scattered. Owing to the limitations of one's senses, one is not in a position to realise how deep and vast is this union, true dawn of the future unions that will take place when the Master is no longer among you in His body, but will be with you with His spirit. You will then know how to love, and how to practice My doctrine. For the time being you are like babies who are breast-fed. You will then be like adults and will be able to take all kinds of food without any harm. And then you will be able to say, as I

say now: "Come to me, all of you, because we are all brothers and because He sacrificed Himself for us all."

There are too many prejudices in Israel! And they are like arrows injuring charity. I am speaking openly to you, loyal followers, because there are no traitors among you, or people with prejudicial ideas, which separate or lead to misunderstanding, obstinacy and hatred against Me, Who points out to you the ways of future times. I cannot speak in a different way. And from now on I will speak less, because I see that words are useless or almost useless. You have heard enough to become perfectly holy and learned. But you have made little progress, you brother-men particularly, because *you like My words but you do not practise them*. From now on, in a more and more pressing manner, I will make you do what you will have to do when the Master has gone back to Heaven, from which He came. *I will let you watch what the future Priest is*. Rather than My words, *you must pay attention to My deeds, repeat them, learn them, add them to My teaching*. You will thus become perfect disciples.

What has the Master done and what has He made you do and practise to day? *Charity in its multiform ways. Charity towards God*. Not just the charity of vocal ritual prayer. But active charity, which renews you in the Lord, despoiling you of the spirit of the world and of the heresies of heathenism, which is to be found not only in heathens, but also in Israel, in the many customary practices that have replaced *the true holy Religion, as open and simple as all things coming from God*. Not good deeds, or apparently good to be praised by men, but holy deeds to deserve the praise of God.

Every man who was born will die. You are aware of that. *But life does not end with death*. It continues in a different form and lasts forever with a reward for those who were just, and a punishment for those who were wicked. The knowledge of a definite judgement must not paralyse you during your lifetime or at the hour of your death. It must be a spur and a restraint, a spur urging you to do good, a restraint deterring you from evil passions. So be true lovers of the true God, always operating with the aim of deserving Him in the future life.

You men, who love grandeur, which grandeur is greater than to become children of God, that is, gods? And you who shun pain, which certainty of suffering no longer is there as that awaiting you in Heaven? *Be holy*. Do you want to establish a kingdom on the Earth? Do you feel that snares are laid for you and are you afraid that you may not succeed? *If you behave as holy people, you will succeed*. Because the very authority ruling over us will not be able to stop you,

notwithstanding all its cohorts, because *you will convince the cohorts to follow My holy doctrine* as I, without any violence, have convinced the women of Rome that the Truth is here...»

«Lord!...» exclaim the Roman ladies seeing that their presence has been disclosed.

«Yes, women. Listen and remember. I tell My followers from Israel and I tell you, who are not from Israel but whose souls are just, what is the statute of My Kingdom.

No rebellions. They are of no use. We are to sanctify the authorities imbuing them with our holiness. It will be a long but successful work. With meekness and patience, without foolish haste or human deviations, by obeying when obedience is not noxious to your own souls, *you will succeed in turning the authorities*, now ruling over us in a pagan way, into Christian authorities protecting us. *Do your duty as subjects towards authorities*, as you do your duty as believers towards God. *You must consider each authority a means of elevation, not of oppression, because it gives you the opportunity to sanctify it and yourselves, through examples and heroism.*

And as you are faithful believers and good citizens, be also good husbands and wives; be holy, chaste, obedient, fond of each other, united to bring up your children in the Lord. Be fatherly and motherly to your servants and slaves, because they also have bodies and souls, feelings and affections like yourselves. If death deprives you of your husband or wife, if possible, do not be anxious to get married again. Love orphans, also on behalf of your deceased companion. *You, servants, be subject to your masters, and if they are faulty, sanctify them through your own example.* You will have great merit in the eyes of the Lord. In future, in My Name, there will be no more servants and masters, but brothers. There will be no different races, but brothers. There will be no more oppressors and oppressed, hating one another, because those who are oppressed will call their oppressors brothers.

And you, who are of the same faith, *love one another, helping one another*, as I made you do today. But do not confine your help to the poor, to the pilgrims, to the sick people of your own race. *Open your arms to everybody*, as Mercy opens them to you. *Let those who have more, help those who have little or nothing. Let those who are more learned teach those who do not know or know little, and let them teach patiently and humbly*, remembering that you really knew nothing

before I taught you. Seek Wisdom not to add lustre to your names, but to obtain assistance in proceeding in the way of the Lord.

Let married women love virgins, and the latter love the former, and both love widows. You are all useful in the Kingdom of the Lord. *The poor must not envy the rich and the rich must not cause hatred* through display of wealth and hardness of heart. *Take care of orphans, sick and homeless people.* Open your hearts, before opening your purses and your homes, because *if you give assistance with an ill grace, you do not honour but you offend God, Who is present in every unhappy person.*

I solemnly tell you that *it is not difficult to serve the Lord.* It is enough to love the true God and your neighbour, whoever that may be. I will be present every time you cure a sore or a disease. *And everything you do for Me in future, if it is good, it will be done to Me; if it is bad, it will still be done to Me.* Do you want to make Me suffer? Do you want to lose the Kingdom of peace, do you want to miss the opportunity of becoming gods, just by not being good to your neighbour?

Never again shall we be all united as we are now. More Passovers will come... but it will not be possible for us to be together for many reasons, first because of partly holy and partly excessive caution, and every excess is faulty, so that we will have to be separated; secondly because I shall not be with you in future Passovers... But *remember this day.* In future you are to do, not only at Passover, but always, what I made you do today.

I have never deceived you, stating that it is easy to belong to Me. *To belong to Me means not only living in the Light and Truth, but it also implies eating the bread of conflict and persecution.* But the stronger you are in love, the stronger you will be in struggles and persecutions.

Believe in Me. For what I really am: Jesus Christ, the Saviour, Whose Kingdom is not of this world, Whose coming means peace to good people, Whose possession means knowledge and Possession of God, because he who has Me in himself and has himself in Me, is in God, and has God in his spirit now, and will have Him later in the celestial Kingdom forever.

Night has fallen. Tomorrow is Preparation Day. Go. Purify yourselves, meditate, celebrate a holy Passover.

And you women of a different race, but whose spirits are righteous, go. May the

good will by which you are animated be for you the way to come to the Light. In the name of the poor, as I am poor Myself, I bless you for your generous alms, and I bless you for your kind intentions to the Man Who has come to bring love and peace to the Earth. Go! And you, Johanna, and anybody else who is not afraid of snares, may go.»

A whispering of astonishment runs through the meeting while the Roman ladies, who are now only six as Eglah is staying with Mary of Magdala, put into a bag the waxed tablets written by Flavia while Jesus was speaking, and go out after bidding goodbye to everybody collectively. The astonishment is such that no one moves, with the exception of Johanna, Jonathan and Johanna's servants, who are carrying the sleeping children in their arms. But after the hollow noise of the main door being closed tells the remainders that the Romans ladies have gone, the whispering becomes a clamour.

«Who are they?»

«Why were they here?»

«What have they done?»

And above all Judas shouts: «Lord, how do You know about the rich offering they gave me?»

Jesus calms the uproar with a gesture and He says: «They were Claudia and her lady-companions. And while the other ladies of Israel, fearing the wrath of their husbands, or having the same minds and hearts of their husbands, dare not become My followers, the despised pagan ladies, with holy astuteness know how to come to learn the Doctrine which, even if for the time being it is accepted in a human way, still serves to elevate... And this girl, previously a slave, but of Jewish extraction, is the flower offered by Claudia to Christ's followers, as she has been made free and entrusted to the faith of Christ. With regard to My knowing about their offering... Oh! Judas! Everybody but you should ask Me that question! You know that I see in men's hearts.»

«So You know that I spoke the truth when I said that they were laying snares and that I baffled them when I went to make... guilty people speak?»

«That is true.»

«Please say that in a loud voice, that my mother may hear... Mother, I am boy, but not a scoundrel... Mother, let us make peace. Let us love and understand each other, united in serving our Jesus.»

And Judas goes humbly and lovingly to embrace his mother, who says: «Yes, son! Yes, my Judas. Good! Good! Be always good, my child! For yourself, for the Lord! For your poor mother!»

The hall is now full of excitement and comments, and many state that it was not wise to receive the Roman ladies and they reproach Jesus.

Judas hears them, He leaves his mother and hastens to defend the Master. He informs them of his conversation with Claudia and concludes: «Her help is not to be neglected. We have been persecuted even before she came among us. Let her do as she wishes. And remember, it is better not to say a word to anybody. Consider that if to be friendly with heathens is dangerous for the Master, it is just as dangerous for us. The Sanhedrin which, after all, is held back by fear of Jesus because of a lively dread of lifting its hand against the Anointed of the Lord, would not hesitate one moment to kill us like dogs, as we are poor common men. Instead of putting on scandalised looks, remember that only a little while ago you were like frightened sparrows and bless the Lord for helping us through unexpected means, even if you may think they are not legal. They are, however, strong enough to establish the Kingdom of the Messiah. We shall be able to do anything if Rome defends us! Oh! I am no longer afraid! This is a great day! More for this thing than for anything else... Ah! when You will be our Head! What a meek, strong, blessed power! What peace! What justice! The strong friendly Kingdom of the Just One! And the world will be coming slowly to it!... Prophecies will be fulfilled! Crowds, nations... the world will be at Your feet! Oh! Master! You will be the King, and we will be Your ministers... Peace on the Earth, glory in Heaven... Jesus Christ of Nazareth, King of the stock of David, Messiah and Saviour, I greet You and adore You!» and Judas, who seems to be in raptures, concludes prostrating himself: «Your Name is known on the Earth, in Heaven and even in Hell. Your power is infinite. Which strength can resist You, o Lamb and Lion, Priest and King, three times Holy?» and he remains prostrated on the floor in the hall, which is struck dumb with amazement.

371. Preparation Day. The Morning.**30th January 1946.**

Men are lying asleep everywhere in Lazarus' palace, which has been changed into a dormitory for one night. I do not see any women. They have perhaps been taken to the rooms upstairs. The clear daybreak whitens the city slowly, it invades the courtyards of the palace, rousing the first timid chirping of birds in the branches of the shady trees, and the early cooing of doves resting in the cavity of the cornice. But the men do not wake up. Tired and full of food and excitement as they are, they are sleeping and dreaming

Jesus goes into the hall and then into the main courtyard. He washes Himself at a fountain of clear water gurgling in its centre, in a square of myrtle, at the foot of which there are little lilies, similar to the so called French lilies of the valley. He tidies Himself and without making any noise He goes to the staircase leading to the rooms upstairs and to the roof terrace. He goes up there to pray and meditate...

He walks slowly to and fro and the doves are the only ones to see Him: stretching their necks and cooing, they seem to be asking one another: «Who is that?» He then leans against the little wall and remains still, engrossed in thought. Finally He raises His eyes, probably because His attention is drawn by the sudden appearance of the sun, rising behind the hills concealing Bethany and the Jordan valley, and He contemplates the view before Him.

Lazarus' palace is on one of the many ground elevations that make the streets in Jerusalem, particularly the less beautiful ones, so undulated. It is in the centre of the city, slightly south-west. It is situated in a beautiful street leading to the Sixtus, forming a T with it, and it overlooks the lower part of the town and faces towards Bezetha, Moriah and Ophel and the Mount of Olives, which is behind them; behind it there is Mount Sion, the area to which it belongs, while on both sides one's eyes rove over the southern hills, whereas Bezetha to the north hides most of the view. But beyond the Gihon valley, Golgotha comes into view looking yellowish in the pink light of dawn: it seems dismal even in that joyful light.

Jesus is looking at it... His look, although more manly and pensive, reminds me of that of the remote vision of Jesus disputing with the doctors, when He was twelve years old. But it is not a terrified look as it was not then. It is the dignified look of a hero contemplating the field of his last battle.

He then turns round to look at the hills to the south of the town and He says: «Caiaphas' house!» and His eyes follow the itinerary from that spot to Gethsemane, then to the Temple, He then looks beyond the town walls, towards Calvary...

The sun has now risen and the town is full of light...

Someone knocks loudly and uninterruptedly at the main door of the palace. Jesus leans out to see who is knocking, but the projecting cornice and the fact that the door is in the inner side of the thick walls, prevent Him from seeing anyone. But He hears the noise of the voices of the men who are beginning to wake up, while the door, which was opened by Levi, is closed with a bang. And He then hears many voices of men and women calling His Name... He hastens downstairs saying:

«Here I am. What do you want?»

As soon as those who were calling Him, hear Him, they rush upstairs shouting. They are the oldest apostles and disciples, and amongst them there is Jonah, the caretaker of Gethsemane. They are all speaking at the same time and it is thus impossible to understand what they say.

Jesus has to order them sternly to stop where they are and to be silent, in order to calm them. He then approaches them asking: «What is the matter?»

There is great confusion once again, caused by their shouting, which cannot be understood. Behind those who are shouting there are women and disciples who look sad or astonished.

«Let one speak at a time. You, Peter, first.»

«Jonah came... He said that there were many of them and that they looked for You everywhere. He was upset all night and when the gates were opened, he went to Johanna's and was told that You were here. What shall we do? We have to keep Passover after all!»

Jonah of Gethsemane confirms the information saying: «Yes, they even ill-treated me. I told them that I did not know where You were and that perhaps You were not coming back. But they saw all your clothes and they understood that you were coming back to Gethsemane. Don't cause me any harm, Master! I have always given You hospitality with all my heart, and last night I suffered because of You. But ...»

«Be not afraid! From now on I will not expose you to any danger. I will no longer stay in your house. I will come there when I happen to be passing through, at night time, to pray... You cannot forbid Me...» Jesus is most kind to frightened Jonah of Gethsemane.

But the golden voice of Mary of Magdala bursts out vehemently: «Since when, man, are you forgetting that you are a servant and that our compliance makes you behave as if you were the master? To whom does the house and the olive grove belong? We are the only ones who can say to the Rabbi: “Do not go and cause harm to our property.” But we will not say that. Because it would still be the greatest of blessings, if the enemies of the Christ should destroy trees walls and even make the hill slide down, because everything would be destroyed for giving hospitality to Love, and Love would repay us, His faithful friends, with love. Let them come and destroy everything. What does it matter, if He loves us and is unhurt?!»

Jonah is seized with the fear of his enemies and of his earnest mistress, and he whispers: «What about if they injure my son?....»

Jesus comforts him saying: «I am telling you not to be afraid. I will not stop there any more. You can tell those who ask you, that the Master no longer lives at Gethsemane... No, Mary! It is better to do so. Leave it to Me! I thank you for your generosity... But it is not My hour, it is not yet My hour! I suppose they were Pharisees...»

«And members of the Sanhedrin, and Herodians, and Sadducees... and Herod's soldiers... and... everybody... I am still trembling with fear... But You can see, Lord! I ran to warn You... at Johanna's... then here...» The man is anxious to point out that he has done his duty on behalf of the Master, at the risk of his own peace.

Jesus smiles kindly and sympathetically and says: «Yes, I see. May God reward you for it. Go home in peace now. I will let you know where you should send our bags or I will send somebody to collect them Myself.»

The man goes away and everybody, with the exception of Jesus and Our Blessed Lady, blames or mocks him. Peter's remarks are biting, the Iscariot's caustic and Bartholomew's ironic. Judas Thaddeus does not say anything, but looks at him in such a way! The whispering and the reproachful glances continue also among the women, ending in the final blow of Mary of Magdala, who replies to the bow of the servant-peasant: «I will tell Lazarus to come and get poultry

crammed at Gethsemane for the banquet of the feast.»

«I have no hen-house, madame.»

«You, Mark and Mary: three wonderful capons!»

Everybody laughs at the angry and... meaningful witty remark of Mary of Lazarus, who is furious at the fear of her subjects and at the discomfort of the Master, Who is deprived of the quiet resting place at Gethsemane.

«Do not be upset, Mary! Peace! Not everybody has a heart like yours!»

«Oh! Unfortunately not! If everybody had a heart like mine, Rabboni! Not even spears and arrows shot at me, would separate me from You!»

The men whisper... Mary hears them and replies at once: «Of course! We shall see! And I hope soon, whether this will help you to pluck up courage. Nothing will frighten me, if I can serve my Rabbi! Yes, serve Him! And, my brothers, one helps when there is danger! When there is no danger, one does not serve, one enjoys oneself!... And the Messiah is not to be followed by us, just for the sake of enjoying ourselves!»

The men lower their heads, stung by the truth.

Mary squeezes through the crowd and comes before Jesus. «What have You decided, Master? It is Preparation Day. Where will You celebrate Your Passover? Give Your orders... and if I have found grace with You, grant me to offer You my supper-room and to see to everything...»

«You have found grace with the Father of Heaven, and thus you have found it with the Son of the Father. Every movement of the Father is sacred to the Son. But if I accept the supper-room, let Me go to the Temple, to sacrifice the lamb, as a good Israelite...»

«And if they catch You?» many exclaim.

«They will not catch Me. They may dare to do so at night, in the dark, as rascals are wont to do. But not in the middle of crowds who worship Me. Do not become cowardly!...»

«Oh! In any case there is Claudia now!» shouts Judas. «The King and Kingdom are no longer in danger!...»

«Judas, please! Do not let them collapse within you! Do not lay snares for them

within yourself. My Kingdom is not of this world. I am not a king like those sitting on thrones. Mine is the Kingdom of the spirit. If you lower it to the meanness of a human kingdom, you are laying snares for it and causing it to collapse within you.»

«But Claudia!...»

«But Claudia is a heathen. She cannot, therefore, appreciate the value of the spirit. It is a lot if she understands and supports Him, Who, according to her, is a Wise Man... Many people in Israel do not even consider Me wise!... But you are not a heathen, My dear friend! Do not allow your providential meeting with Claudia to become detrimental to you, and likewise do not allow the gift, granted by God to strengthen your faith and your will to serve the Lord, to become a spiritual disaster for you.»

«How could it, my Lord?»

«Easily. And not in you only. *If a gift given to assist the weakness of man, instead of fortifying him and making him desirous of supernatural good or even simply of moral good, should instead weigh him down with human desires and divert him from the right way to vicious ways, then the gift would become a damage. Pride is sufficient to turn a gift into a damage.* The disorientation caused by something that elates man is sufficient, whereby one loses sight of the supreme good Purpose, and the gift becomes harmful. Are you convinced? Claudia's coming should give you only the support of one consideration. This one: *if a heathen has perceived the greatness of My doctrine and the necessity that it should triumph, you, and all the disciples with you, should feel that more intensely and, consequently, devote yourselves entirely to that. But always in a spiritual way.* Always... And now let us decide. Where do you think we ought to celebrate this Passover? I want you to be in the peace of spirit for this ritual Supper, *in order to feel God, Who is not perceived in a state of agitation.* We are many. But I would love to be all together so that you may be able to say: “We celebrated one Passover with Him.” Choose therefore a place where, being divided according to the rite, we can form groups, each group being sufficient to consume its own lamb, and we may be able to say: “We were all united, and one could hear the voice of his brother.”»

Some mention this place, some that one. But Lazarus' sisters are the winners. «Oh! Lord! Here! We shall send for our brother. We have many halls and rooms here. We will be all together and according to the rite. Accept our offer, Lord!

The palace has rooms suitable for at least two hundred people divided into groups of twenty people each. But we are not so many. Make us happy, Lord! Do it for our Lazarus who is so sad... and so ill» and the two sisters conclude weeping: «...we do not think that he will live to eat another Passover...»

«What do you all think? Do you think we should agree with the good sisters?» says Jesus, putting the question to everybody.

«I would say yes» says Peter.

«And I, too» says the Iscariot and many more with him.

Those who do not speak, nod assent.

«Do the necessary, then. And we will go to the Temple to prove that he who is sure that he is obeying the Most High, is not afraid and is not a coward. Let us go. My peace to those who are remaining.»

And Jesus goes down the rest of the staircase, He crosses the hall and goes out with the disciples into the street crowded with people

372. Preparation Day. At the Temple.

31st January 1946.

Jesus enters the Temple. And from His very first steps in it one easily understands the evil disposition of minds towards the Nazarene. They leer at Him and give orders to the Temple guards to watch «the disturber», and they give them in public, so that everybody may hear and see; they shout coarse scornful words at those who are with Him and deliberately push the apostles... In short their hatred is such that the manners of the wonderful Pharisees, scribes and doctors are coarse beyond comprehension and they do not realise, blinded as they are with malice, that their behaviour disgraces them also as human beings.

Jesus passes by calmly as if their attitude did not concern Him! And whenever He sees any important person who either by sacred rank or power belongs to the «ruling» class of the Jewish world, He is the first to greet him. And if that person does not greet in return, Jesus does not change His attitude. When He looks away from such proud people and He sees one or more of the many

humble people around Him, His face brightens with a very gentle smile. And there are many of the beggars and sick people whom He gathered together yesterday and who, through their unexpected good luck, are now in a position to celebrate Passover as perhaps they had not done for years, and who have spontaneously formed groups and are now going to buy the lambs to be sacrificed, and the poor wretches look so happy as they are now just like everybody else, both with regard to their clothes and their means. And He stops and kindly listens to them, to their resolutions, to their amazing stories, to their blessings... Old people, children, widows, people sick yesterday: now cured; miserable, ragged, starving, forlorn yesterday: today clad and happy to be like all other men in the days of the great Feast of the Unleavened Bread!

Jesus is greeted, accompanied and followed by a variety of voices, from the silvery ones of children to the trembling voices of old people and between those two extremes there are the timid voices of women. Kisses rain upon His garments and His hands. And Jesus smiles and blesses whilst His enemies, who are as livid with anger as He is bright with peace, chafe with powerless rage.

I hear scraps of conversation...

«You are right! But if we lifted a finger, they (and a Pharisee points at the people pressing round Jesus) would tear us to pieces.»...

«Just imagine! He gathered us together, He fed us, He gave us clothes and cured us, and many have found work and help through His rich disciples. But in actual fact, everything came from Him, may God always save Him!» says a man, who probably yesterday was ill and a beggar.

... «No wonder! That is how the rebel bribes people, and stirs them against us» says a scribe threateningly, speaking to a colleague.

«One of His disciples took my name and she told me to go to her after Passover, because she will take me to her property at Bether. Do you realise what that means? She will be taking me and my children. So I will be working. It is a pleasure to work when one is protected and safe. And my Levi will not break his back working in the fields. The lady who is taking us on will employ him in the rose-gardens... It will be a pastime, I say! Ah! May the Eternal Father grant glory and welfare to His Messiah!» says the widow from the plain of Sharron to a well to do Israelite woman, who was questioning her.

«Oh! and could I not help?... Are you all settled, you who were gathered

together yesterday?» asks the wealthy Israelite.

«No, we are not, woman. There are still some widows with children and some men.»

«I would like to ask Him whether He will allow me to help Him.»

«Call Him.»

«I dare not.»

«Go, Levi and tell Him that a woman wishes to speak to Him...»

The boy runs away and informs Jesus.

In the meantime a Sadducee ill-treats an old man who is lecturing in the middle of a crowd from beyond the Jordan and is singing the praises of the Master of Galilee.

The old man defends himself saying: «Am I doing anything wrong? Did you want to be praised? All you had to do was do what He does. But you, may God forgive you, you despise poverty and old age, instead of loving them, because you are a false Israelite, as you do not respect Deuteronomy by having mercy on the poor.»

«Do you hear that? That is the result of the doctrine of the instigator! He teaches common people to offend the saints of Israel.»

A priest of the Temple replies to him: «But it is our fault, if that happens! We do nothing but utter threats, without carrying them out!»

... Jesus in the meantime says to the woman of Israel: «If you really want to be a mother to orphans and a sister to widows, go to Chuza's palace at the Sixtus. Tell Johanna that I have sent you. And may the ground be as fruitful to you as Eden, because of your pity. And may your heart be more fruitful in a deeper and deeper love for your neighbour.»

At the same time He sees the guards drag the old man who had spoken previously. He shouts: «What are you doing to the old man? And what has he done?»

«He insulted the officials who were reprimanding him.»

«That is not true. A Sadducee maltreated me because I was speaking of You to those pilgrims. And as he lifted his hand against me, because I am old and poor,

I told him that he is a false Israelite who tramples on the words of Deuteronomy.»

«Set the old man free. He is with Me. He spoke the truth. Not sincerity: the Truth. If God speaks through the lips of children, He speaks also through the lips of old people. It is written: “Do not despise a man in his old age, because those who have grown old belong to us.” It is also written: “Do not ignore the talk of the wise, be conversant with their proverbs, since from these you will learn wisdom and the theory of intelligence”, and also: “Do not be talkative where there are old men.” Let Israel remember that, that part of Israel which says that it is perfect, otherwise the Most High will give the lie to it. Father, come here beside Me.»

The old man approaches Jesus, while the Sadducees, impressed by the reproach, go away angrily. «I am a Jewess of the Diaspora, o expected King. Could I serve you like that woman whom You sent to Johanna?» says a woman, who is very much like that one, named Nicky, who wiped Jesus' face on Golgotha and received the Towel. But Jewesses are very much alike and after many months after that vision, I might be wrong.

Jesus looks at her. He sees a woman about forty years old, well dressed, of frank manner. He asks her: «You are a widow, are you not?»

«Yes, I am. And I have no children. I came back recently and I bought some land at Jericho, to be close to the Holy City. But now I see that You are greater than it is. And I will follow You. And I beg You to accept me as Your servant. I heard of You from Your disciples, but You exceed what they told me.»

«All right. But what do you want exactly?»

«To help You with the poor people and make people love You and know You, as best I can. I know many people in the colonies of the Diaspora, as I used to follow my husband in his business. I have means, but I need little for myself. So I can do quite a lot. And I am anxious to do much for Your sake and to pray for the soul of him who married me twenty years ago and who was my loving companion until he breathed his last. He told me when he was dying. He seemed to prophesy: “When I am dead, deliver this flesh of mine, which loved you, to the tomb and go back to our country. You will find the Promised One. Oh! You will see Him! Look for Him and follow Him. He is the Redeemer and the Reviver and He will open the door of Life to me. Be kind and help me to be ready when He will open Heaven to those who have no debts with Justice and be

good in order to deserve to meet Him soon. Swear that you will do so and that you will turn the unfruitful tears of widowhood into active strength. Follow the example of Judith, my darling, and all the nations will know your name.” My poor husband! I ask You only to take cognizance of me...»

«I will know you as a good disciple. You may go to Johanna as well and may God be with you.»

... As busy as bees Jesus' enemies attack Him once again while He is making His way to the enclosure of the Temple, after He has sacrificed His lamb and has waited for those of the disciples to be sacrificed, in order to have enough for everybody.

«When are You going to stop posing as a king? You are not a king! And You are not a prophet! How long do You intend to trespass on our kindness, You sinner, rebel and cause of evil to Israel? How many times have we to tell You that You have no right to act as a Rabbi in here?»

«I came to sacrifice a lamb. You cannot forbid that. In any case I would remind you of Adonijah and Solomon.»

«What have they got to do with it? What do You mean? Are You Adonijah?»

«No. Adonijah made himself king by fraud, but Wisdom was watching and advising, and Solomon only became king. I am not Adonijah. I am Solomon.»

«And who is Adonijah?»

«All of you.»

«We? How can You say that?»

«With truth and justice.»

«We comply with the Law, with every point of it, we believe in the prophets and...»

«No. You do not believe in the prophets. They mention Me, but you do not believe in Me. You do not comply with the Law. It prescribes just deeds, which you do not do. Even the offerings, which you come here to make, are not honest. It is written: “*The sacrifice of an offering unjustly acquired is a mockery.*” It is written: “*The Most High takes no pleasure in offerings from wicked people, He pays no attention to their offerings, multiplying sacrifices will not gain His pardon for sin.*” It is written: “*Offering sacrifice from the property of the poor is*

as bad as slaughtering a son before his father's very eyes." That is what is written, Johanan! It is written: "A meagre diet is the very life of the poor, he who withholds it is a man of blood." That is what is written, Ishmael! It is written: "A man murders his neighbour if he robs him of his livelihood." That is what is written, o Doras son of Doras. It is written: "He who sheds blood and he who withholds an employee's wages are brothers." That is what is written, o Johanan, Ishmael, Hananiah, Doras, Jonathan. And remember that it is also written: "Whoever turns a deaf ear to the cries of the poor, will cry too, but he will not be listened to." And you, Eleazar ben Annas, remember and remind your father that it is written: "Let My priests be holy, they must not allow themselves to be contaminated for any reason whatsoever." And you, Cornelius, had better know that it is written: "Anyone who curses father and mother, must die", and death is given not only by the executioner. A more severe death awaits those who sin against their parents: the eternal dreadful death. And you, Tolme', remember that it is written: "He who practises magic, will be exterminated by Me." And you, Sadoc, golden scribe, remember that between an adulterer and his procurer of adultery there is no difference in the eyes of God and that it is written that *he who swears falsehood will be devoured by everlasting flames.* And tell him, who has forgotten it, that *he who marries a virgin and when he is satiated with her, he rejects her with false accusations, is to be condemned.* Oh! not in this world. In future life, because of his deceit, his perjury, the damage caused to his wife and his adultery. What? Are you all running away? Before the Defenceless One Who is speaking words that are not His own, but belong to those whom you declare to be the saints of Israel, thus you cannot say that the Defenceless One is a blasphemer, because if you did, you would call blasphemers the Books of Wisdom and those of Moses, which were dictated by God? Are you fleeing from the Defenceless One? Are perhaps My words stones? Or are they rousing your consciences by striking the hard bronze of your hardened hearts, and your consciences feel that it is their duty to become purified, not only in your bodies, in this Preparation Day, so that you may consume the holy lamb without any sin of impurity? Oh! if it is so, praised be the Lord! Because, since you wish to be praised as wise men, remember that *it is true wisdom to know oneself, to confess one's errors, to repent* and thus celebrate the rites with "true" devotion. That is, with the cult and rite of your souls, and not with an external cult... They have gone! Let us go as well to give peace to those who are waiting for us...»

373. Preparation Day. In the Streets of Jerusalem.

2nd February 1946.

They come out of the Temple, overcrowded with people and plunge into the swarming streets, where everybody is making haste in the last preparations for Passover and late-comers are anxiously looking for a room, a hall, any place at all, to use as a supper-room, where to consume the lamb.

It is thus easy to meet people but it is also easy not to recognise one another in the dense agitated crowd, as one sees faces of all ages, of all the regions where there are Israelites, and where the pure blood of Israel, through mixture of blood or simply through mimicry, has become like other races. One can thus see Jews who are like Egyptians or look like Nubians because of their thick prominent lips, snub noses and facial angle; others with small fine features, slender bodies, witty eyes make one understand that they come from the Greek colonies or are crossed with Greeks; whereas tall robust men, with rather square faces, clearly show that they are connected with the Latin race; and there are many who modern people would say are Circassians or Persians with a resemblance of Mongolian or Indian eyes in the very white faces of the former and the olive-hued faces of the latter. A beautiful kaleidoscope of faces and garments! The result is that one's eyes become tired and one ends up by looking without seeing. But what escapes one is noticed by another.

It is therefore understandable that what escapes the Master, Who is always absorbed in thought when He is left in peace, without being asked questions, is noticed by this one or that one of His followers. And the apostles, those who are closer to Jesus, point out to one another what they see and talk to one another in low voices making worldly comments... on the people they Point out.

One such biting comment on an ex-disciple who passes by haughtily, pretending he does not see them, is heard by Jesus, Who asks: «To whom were those words referred?»

«To that blockhead over there» says James of Zebedee. «He pretended he did not see us, and he is not the only one to do so. But when he wanted to be cured and was looking for You, he did see us! I hope he gets a malignant pustule!»

«James!! Are you standing beside Me with such feelings while you are getting

ready to consume the lamb? In actual fact you are more inconsistent than he. *He went away openly when he felt he could not do what I said.* You, instead, have remained but you do not do what I say. Are you not perhaps a greater sinner than he?»

James blushes so deeply that he looks congested, and he withdraws behind his companions, as he is humiliated.

«It hurts to see them behave like that, Master!» says John to support his brother who has been reproached. «Our love rebels seeing their estrangement...»

«Of course. But do you think that you can bring them back to love by so doing? Discourteous acts, bad words, insults have never brought a rival or a man of different opinion to where he should be led. *It is through kindness, patience, charity, persevering notwithstanding refusals, that you achieve your purpose.* I understand and pity your hearts, which suffer seeing that I am not loved. But I would like to see and know that you are more supernatural in your acts and means to make Me loved. Come on, James, come here. I did not speak to humiliate you. Let us love and understand one another, at least among ourselves, My dear friends... There is already so much incomprehension and sorrow for the Son of man!»

James, who is cheerful again, goes back beside Him.

They walk for some time in silence, then Thomas bursts into a thundering exclamation: «But it's really a shame!»

«What?» asks Jesus.

«The meanness of so many people! Master, don't You see how many pretend they do not know You?»

«So what? Will their behaviour change one iota of what has been written about Me? No, it will not. *Only with regard to themselves what could be written will change.* Because in the eternal books it could be said of them: "Good disciples", whereas it will be written: "They were not good, the coming of the Messiah meant nothing to them." Dreadful words, you know? Worse than: "Adam and Eve sinned." *Because I can cancel that sin. But I will not be able to cancel the sin of those who deny the Word Saviour...* Let us go this way. I will stop with My brothers, with Simon Peter and James in the suburb of Ophel. Judas of Simon also will remain with Me. But Simon Zealot, John and Thomas will go to Gethsemane to get the bags...»

«Yes, so Jonah's lamb will not go down his throat the wrong way» says Peter, who is still angry. The others laugh...

«Be good! There is no reason to be astonished if he is afraid. You might feel the same tomorrow.»

«Me, Master? The sea of Galilee is more likely to turn into wine than I am to be afraid» states Peter confidently.

«And yet... the other evening... Oh! Simon! You did not look so brave on the staircase of Chuza's palace» remarks Judas of Kerioth pungently, without being too ironic... but sufficiently sarcastic to bite Peter.

«I was afraid for the Lord, that is why I was worried! For no other reason.»

«Very well! Let us hope that we shall... never be afraid, so that we may not cut a bad figure, eh!» replies Judas of Kerioth, clapping him on his shoulder, protectingly and maliciously...

At any other moment his behaviour would have given rise to a reaction. But Peter, since the previous evening, is full of... admiration for Judas and puts up with him in everything.

Jesus says: «Philip and Nathanael with Andrew and Matthew, please go to Lazarus' palace and tell them that we are coming.»

The four apostles part and the others proceed with Jesus. The disciples, with the exception of Stephen and Isaac, go with the apostles sent to the palace.

At the Ophel suburb there is a further parting. Those bound for Gethsemane go away quickly with Isaac. Stephen remains with Jesus, the sons of Alphaeus, Peter, James and the Iscariot and to avoid stopping at the cross-roads, they proceed slowly in the same direction as those who have gone to Gethsemane. They go along the same little street along which Jesus will be taken by His torturers on the evening of Holy Thursday. Now, about midday, it is empty. After a short distance they come to a little square with a fountain shaded by a fig-tree, which is opening its little tender leaves above the calm water.

«There is Samuel of Annaleah» says James of Alphaeus, who must know him well. The young man is about to enter a house carrying a lamb... and other foodstuffs.

«He is preparing the Passover supper also for his relative» remarks Judas of

Alphaeus.

«Has he settled here now? Had he not gone away?» asks Peter.

«Yes, he has settled here. They say that he is flirting with the daughter of Cleopas, the sandal-maker. She is wealthy...»

«Ah! So why does he say that Annaleah left him?» asks the Iscariot.

«That's a lie!»

«Man often makes use of lies. And he does not realise that by doing so he takes the wrong path. The first step, one step, is enough, and one can no longer get free... It is birdlime... it is a labyrinth... a snare... A sloping snare...» says Jesus to Judas of Kerioth.

«What a pity! He seemed such a good man last year!» says James of Zebedee.

«Yes. I really thought that he would imitate his girl-friend devoting himself entirely to You and forming a couple of married angels and Your servants. I would have sworn to it!...» says Peter.

«My dear Simon! Never swear on the future of man. It is the most uncertain of all things. No element, existing at the time of the oath, can guarantee a safe oath. *There are criminals who become saints, and there are just people, or apparently just, who become criminals*» Jesus replies to him.

Samuel in the meantime, after going into the house, has come out once again to draw water at the fountain... He thus sees Jesus. He looks at Him with obvious contempt and hurls at Him what is certainly an insult, although I do not understand it, as it was spoken in Hebrew.

The Iscariot jumps forward all of a sudden, he catches him by the arm, shaking him like a tree from which one wants ripe fruit to drop: «Is that how you speak to the Master, you sinner? Down, on your knees, at once! Apologise to Him, you foul tongue of a dirty pig! Down! Or I'll break your neck!» Handsome Judas is furious in his sudden violence! His countenance has changed fearfully. Jesus tries to calm him in vain. He does not release his hold until he sees the sinner kneeling on the muddy earth around the fountain.

«Forgive me» says the unlucky fellow between his teeth, feeling Judas' fingers torture him like pincers. But he says so badly, only because he is forced to it.

Jesus replies: «I am not angry. But you still are, notwithstanding what you say.

Words are useless unless they are uttered with one's heart. But you are still cursing Me in your heart. And you are thus twice guilty. Because you accuse Me and you hate Me for a reason, which your conscience, from its very depth, tells you is not true. And because you are the only one who is at fault, not Annaleah, not I. But I forgive you everything. Go and try to become honest and pleasing to God. Let him go, Judas.»

«I am going. But I hate You! You have led Annaleah astray, and I hate You...»

«But you have found consolation with Rebecca, the sandal-maker's daughter. And you have sought consolation since Annaleah was your fiancée, and although ill, *she thought of you only...*»

«I was a widower... I thought I already was... and I was looking for a wife... I have now gone back to Rebecca because... because Annaleah does not want me» says Samuel to justify himself, when he realises that his mischief has been discovered.

Judas Iscariot concludes: «... and because Rebecca is very rich. She is as ugly as an old worn-out sandal... and as old as a sole lost along the way... but rich, oh! very rich!...» and he laughs sarcastically, while the other runs away.

«How do you, know?» asks Peter.

«Oh!... it is easy to find out where there are virgins and money!»

«Well! Shall we go along this little street, Master? This square is as hot as an oven. It is shaded and windy» implores Peter who is perspiring.

They walk slowly, waiting for the others to come back. The street is deserted. A woman comes out of a door and prostrates herself at Jesus' feet weeping.

«What is the matter?»

«Master!... Are You already purified?»

«Yes. Why are you asking Me?»

«Because I wanted to tell You... But You cannot approach him. He is all rotten... The doctor says that he is infected. I will call the priest after Passover... and... Hinnom will receive him. Don't say that it is my fault. I did not know... He worked at Joppa for many months and he came back saying that he had injured himself. I have used balms and I have bathed him with aromatic herbs... But they do not help. I applied to a herbalist. He gave me some powders for the

blood... I separated the children... the bed... because I was beginning to realise. He got worse. I sent for the doctor. He said to me: "Woman, you know what your duty is and I know mine. It is an injury caused by lust. Separate him from yourself, I will separate him from the people, the priest from Israel. He should have thought about it when he was offending God, you and himself. Let him expiate now." He promised not to say anything until after the Feast of the Unleavened Bread. But if You had mercy on the sinner, on me who love him and on the five innocent children...»

«What do you want Me to do for you? Do you not think that he who sinned should expiate?»

«Yes, Lord! But You are the Living Mercy!» All the faith of which a woman is capable is in her voice, in her eyes, in her kneeling attitude, with her arms stretched out towards the Saviour.

«And what are his feelings?»

«He is disheartened... What else could he be, Lord?»

«A supernatural feeling of repentance, of justice would be sufficient to obtain mercy!...»

«Justice?»

«Yes. He should say: "I have sinned. My sin deserves this and much more, but I ask those whom I offended to have mercy on me."»

«I have already had pity on him. You, God, have mercy on him. I cannot say to You: come in... I am not touching You myself either... But if You want I will call him and I will make him speak from the terrace.»

«Yes, do.»

The woman, with her head inside the door of the house, shouts in a loud voice: «Jacob! Jacob! Go up to the roof. Look out. Don't be afraid.»

A few moments later the man appears at the parapet of the terrace. His face is yellowish and swollen, his neck and one hand are bandaged... the wreck of an infected man... He looks with the watery eyes of a man affected by dishonourable diseases. He asks: «Who wants me?»

«Jacob, the Saviour is here...» The woman says no more but she looks as if she wanted to hypnotise the sick man and instill her thoughts into him...

The man, whether he perceives her thoughts, or through a spontaneous act, stretches his arms and says: «Oh! free me! I believe in You! It is terrible to die like this!»

«It is terrible to fail in one's duty. You did not think of that! You did not think of your children!»

«Have mercy, Lord... On them, on me... Forgive me!» And he leans on the low wall weeping. His bandaged hand is protruding as well as his arm, which is uncovered as his sleeve is pulled up and is spotted with pustules, and swollen: a repulsive sight... The man, in his present position, is like a macabre puppet or a corpse abandoned there and about to decay. A pitiful and disgusting sight at the same time.

The woman is weeping, still on her knees, in the dust. Jesus seems to be waiting for a further word.

At last it is heard among sobs: «I implore You with contrition in my heart! At least assure me that they will not starve... and then... I will go with resignation... But save my soul, o Blessed Saviour! At least that!»

«Yes, I will cure you. For the innocent children's sake and to give you the opportunity to become just. Do you understand? Remember that the Saviour cured you. God will absolve you of your sins according to how you respond to this grace. Goodbye. Peace to you woman.» And He almost runs away to meet those who are coming from Gethsemane. Not even the shouts of the man who feels and sees that he has been cured can stop Him, or those of his wife...

«Let us go along this lane, to avoid passing there again» says Jesus after He has joined the others. They walk along a miserable lane, which is so narrow that two people can hardly go along it walking side by side and if one should meet a donkey with a pack-saddle, one would have to stick to the wall like a stamp. The light is very faint because the roofs almost touch each other. It is a solitary, silent, bad smelling lane. They proceed in single file to the end of it. Then at a little square, crowded with boys, they all get together.

«Why did You say those words to that man? You never said them before...» asks Peter curiously.

«Because that man will be one of My enemies. And his future sin will aggravate his present fault.»

«And You cured him?!» they all ask with surprised countenance.

«Yes. For the innocent children's sake.»

«H'm! He will fall ill again...»

«No, he will take care of his body, after the fright he had and what he suffered. He will not be taken ill again.»

«But he will sin against You, as You said. I would have let him die.»

«You are a sinner, Simon of Jonah.»

«And You are too good, Jesus of Nazareth» replies Peter. They disappear in a central street and I no longer can see them.

A note of mine.

I have recognised both the man who was cured and Samuel. The former is the man who hit Jesus' head with a stone at His Passion. I recognise him better than his wife, who was sorrowful then as she is now and I recognise the house, which has a characteristically tall door with three steps. Likewise, notwithstanding the mask of hatred that transforms him, I recognise in Samuel the young man who kills his mother with a kick in order to be able to go and strike the Master with a cudgel.

374. Preparation Day. The Evening.

3rd February 1946.

When Jesus enters the palace, He sees that it is crowded with servants from Bethany, who are busy making preparations. Lazarus, who is lying on a little bed and is suffering very much, greets the Master with a faint smile. He hastens towards him, bending kindly over the little bed and asking: «You have suffered a great deal, My dear friend, because of the jolting of the wagon, have you not?»

«Very much, Master» replies Lazarus, so exhausted that the very memory of what he felt makes tears well up in his eyes.

«Through My fault! Forgive Me!»

Lazarus takes one of Jesus' hands up to his face, rubs his skinny cheek against it, kisses it and whispers: «Oh! It was no fault of Yours, Lord! I am so happy that You are celebrating Passover with me... my last Passover!...»

«With God's will, notwithstanding everything, you will celebrate many more, Lazarus. And your heart will always be with Me.»

«Oh! I am a finished man! You are consoling me... but it is all over. And I am sorry...» He weeps.

«See, Lord? Lazarus does nothing but weep» says Martha compassionately. «Tell him not to cry. He wears himself out!»

«The body still has its rights. It is painful to suffer, Martha, and the flesh weeps. And it needs relief. But the soul is resigned, is it not, My friend? Your just soul is willing to do the will of the Lord...»

«Yes... But I weep because, since You are so persecuted, You will not be able to assist me at the hour of my death... I shudder at the thought of death, I am afraid to die... But if You were here, I would not feel thus. I would take shelter in Your arms... and I would fall asleep like that... What shall I do? How shall I be able to die without feeling that I do not want to obey the dreadful Will?»

«Cheer up! Do not let that worry you! See? You are making your sisters weep... The Lord will help you so paternally that you will not be afraid. Sinners must be afraid...»

«But You, if You can, will You come to me when I am in agony? Promise me!»

«I promise that and even more.»

«While they are preparing, tell me what You have done this morning...»

And Jesus, sitting on the edge of the little bed, holding one of Lazarus' skinny hands in His own, tells him in detail what happened, until Lazarus, who is exhausted, falls asleep. Jesus does not leave him even then. He remains still in order not to disturb his refreshing slumber and makes signs to make the least possible noise, so much so that Martha, after bringing a refreshment to Jesus, withdraws on tiptoe, drawing the heavy curtain and closing the solid door. The noise of the busy house is thus deadened to a barely perceptible low sound. Lazarus is sleeping. Jesus is engrossed in prayer and meditation.

Some hours pass thus, until Mary of Magdala brings a small lamp, because it is getting dark and the windows are closed.

«Is he still sleeping?» she whispers.

«Yes. He is very calm. It will do him good.»

«He has never slept so long for months... I think that the fear of death made him restless. With You close to him he is not afraid of anything... He is fortunate!»

«Why, Mary?»

«Because he will be able to have You beside him when he dies. But I...»

«Why not?»

«Because You want to die... soon. And who knows when I will die. Let me die before You, Master!»

«No, you will have to serve Me for a long time yet.»

«So I am right in saying that Lazarus is fortunate!»

«All the beloved ones will be as fortunate as he is, even more so...»

«Who are they? The pure, are they not?»

«*Those who know how to love totally.* You, for instance, Mary.»

«Oh! My Master!» Mary throws herself down, on the multi-coloured mat that covers the floor of this room, and she remains there, adoring her Jesus.

Martha, who is looking for her, looks into the room. «Come on, then! We must prepare the red hall for the supper of the Lord.»

«No, Martha. Give that room to the most humble guests, to Johanan's peasants, for instance.»

«Why, Master?»

«Because each poor man is Jesus and *I am in all of them. Always love the poor whom no one loves, if you want to be perfect.* Prepare for Me in the entrance-hall. If you leave open the doors of the many rooms opening on to it, everybody will be able to see Me and I shall see everybody.»

Martha, who is not very happy, objects: «What? You in the entrance-hall?... It is not worthy of You!...»

«Go, do as I say. It is most worthy to do what the Master advises.»

Martha and Mary go out noiselessly and Jesus remains patiently to watch His friend who is resting with a distribution of the guests, which

Supper has now begun, from a human point of view is not very just, but with a superior view aiming at giving honour and love to those who are usually neglected by the world.

Thus Johanan's peasants with Marjiam, Isaac and other disciples, to make up the ritual number, are sitting in the splendid regal red hall, the vault of which is supported by two columns of red porphyry, between which a long table has been placed. In the hall where they had supper the previous evening there are some more of the most humble disciples. In the white hall, a dream of white splendour, there are the virgin-disciples, and with them, only four in number, there are Lazarus' sisters and Anastasica and other young women. But the queen of the feast is Mary, the preeminent Virgin. In the next room, which is perhaps a library because all around the walls there are tall dark bookcases, which perhaps contain or contained rolls, there are the widows and the wives and they are looked after by Eliza of Bethzur and Mary of Alphaeus. And so on.

But what strikes one is to see Jesus in the marble entrance-hall. It is true that the refined taste of Lazarus' sisters has turned the square entrance into a large hall, which is brighter, more embellished and splendid than any hall. But it is still the entrance! Jesus is with the Twelve, but Lazarus is beside Him. And with Lazarus there is also Maximinus.

The supper proceeds according to the rite... and Jesus shines with joy and pleasure being in the centre of all His faithful disciples.

When the supper is over, the last chalice has been consumed and the last psalm sung, all those who were in the different rooms crowd into the entrance. But they cannot all go in, because the table takes up much room.

«Let us go into the red hall, Master. We will push the table against the wall and we will all be around You» suggests Lazarus beckoning to the servants to do so.

Jesus, Who is sitting in the centre, between the two precious columns, under the bright chandelier, on a tall pedestal formed with two bed-seats used for the supper, now really looks like a king on a throne in the midst of His courtiers.

His linen tunic, which He put on before supper, shines as if it were woven with precious threads, and looks even whiter against the opaque red of the walls and the bright red of the columns. And His countenance is really divine and regal while He speaks or listens to those around Him. Even the most humble ones, whom He wanted near Him, speak confidently, mentioning their hopes, their worries with simplicity and faith, as they feel that they are loved in a brotherly way by the others.

But the happiest among so many happy people is Marjiam's grandfather! He does not part from his grandson even for one moment, and he delights in looking at him and listening to him... Now and again, as he is sitting beside Marjiam, who is standing, he rests his white head on the chest of his grandson, who caresses it.

Jesus sees him do this several times and He asks him: «Father, is your heart happy?»

«Oh! very happy, my Lord! I cannot believe that it is true. I have but one desire now...»

«Which?»

«The one I mentioned to my son. But he does not approve of it.»

«What is your desire?»

«I would like to die, if possible, in this peace. Soon, at least. Because I have already received the greatest blessing. No human being can have more on the Earth. I want to go... suffer no more... go... How rightly You spoke in the Temple, Lord! “Offering sacrifice from the property of the poor is as bad as slaughtering a son before his father's very eyes.” Only his fear of You prevents Johanan from emulating Doras. He is forgetting what happened to the other one, his fields are thriving and he fertilises them with our perspiration. Is perspiration not the property of the poor workman, his very self that is worn out with work exceeding his strength? He does not beat us, he gives us enough to enable us to work. But does he not exploit us more than his oxen? Will you tell Him, o my companions...»

Johanan's new and old peasants nod assent.

«H'm! I think that... Yes, that Your words have made him a greater vampire... to their detriment... Why did You say them, Master?» asks Peter.

«Because he deserved them. What do you say, you workers of his fields?»

«Oh! yes! The first months... it was all right. But now... it is worse than before» avers Micah.

«The bucket of the well is pulled down by its own weight» declares John the priest.

«Yes, and a wolf soon grows weary of looking like a lamb» confirms Hermas.

The women, who are deeply moved, whisper to one another.

Jesus looks at the poor peasants with eyes wide with pity, and He is anguished at not being able to relieve them.

Lazarus says: «I offered absurd amounts of money to have those fields and give these men peace. But I did not succeed in getting them. Doras hates me, he is exactly like his father.»

«Well... we shall die thus. It is our destiny. But the time for us to rest in Abraham's bosom will certainly come!» exclaims Saul, another peasant of Johanan's.

«In God's bosom, son! In God's bosom. Redemption will be completed, Heaven will be open and you will go to Heaven and...»

Somebody hammers at the main door, which resounds loudly. The guests become agitated.

«Who is it?»

«Who goes about in Passover evening?»

«Soldiers?»

«Pharisees?»

«Herod's soldiers?»

But while the agitation spreads, Levi, the caretaker of the palace, appears.

«Forgive me, Rabbi» he says «there is a man who wants You. He is in the entrance. He looks very depressed. He is old and looks like a man of the people. He wishes to see You at once.»

«Hey! This is no evening for miracles! Tell him to come back tomorrow...» says Peter.

«No. Every evening is the hour for miracles and mercy» says Jesus standing up

and descending from His seat to go towards the hall.

«Are You going alone? I will come with You» says Peter.

«No, stay where you are.» He goes out with Levi.

Near the heavy main door, at the other end of the entrance, which is now in half-darkness as all the lights have been put out, there is a very excited old man. Jesus approaches him.

«Stop, Master. I have perhaps touched a dead body and I do not want to contaminate You. I am the relative of Samuel, Annaleah's fiance. We were eating our supper and Samuel drank all the time... as it is not right to do. But the young man seems to have become mad for some time. It's remorse, Lord! He was half-drunk and while drinking again he was saying: "So I cannot remember whether I told Him that I hate Him. Because, I must tell you that I cursed the Rabbi." And he looked like Cain to me, because he went on repeating: "My wickedness is too great. I do not deserve to be forgiven! I must drink! I must drink to forget. Because it is written that he who curses his God will carry his sin and must die." He was raving like that when a relative of Annaleah's mother came into the house to ask about the repudiation. Samuel, who was almost drunk, replied with coarse words and the man threatened to take him to justice for the damage he was causing to the family honour. Samuel slapped his face. They came to blows... I am old, my sister is old, the servant and the maid are also old. What could the four of us and the two girls, Samuel's sisters, do? All we could do was to shout and try to separate them! Nothing else... And Samuel took the hatchet with which we had prepared the firewood for the lamb and hit the man on the head with it... He did not split his head, because he hit him with the butt-end and not the blade. The man staggered babbling and fell... We did not shout any longer... as we did not wish to attract the attention of people... We bolted the door... We were terrified... We poured some water on the man's head hoping he would come round. But he babbled all the time. He was certainly dying. At times he seemed dead. So I ran here to call You. His relatives will be looking for him tomorrow, perhaps earlier. And they will come to us, because they certainly know that he came. And they will find him dead... And Samuel, according to the Law, will be killed... Lord! Lord! Disgrace is already on top of us... We don't want that! For the sake of my sister, Lord, have mercy on us! He cursed You... But his mother loves You... What shall we do?»

«Wait for Me here. I will come» and Jesus goes back to the hall and from the

door He calls: «Judas of Kerioth, come with Me.»

«Where, Lord?» asks Judas obeying promptly.

«You will see. All of you stay here in peace and love. We shall soon be back.»

They go out the hall, through the entrance and leave the house. Through deserted dark roads they soon reach the tragic house.

«Samuel's house?! Why?...»

«Be quiet, Judas. I brought you with Me, because I rely on your common sense.»

The old man has made himself known. They go in. They go upstairs, to the supper room, where they dragged the injured man.

«A dead man?! But Master, we will be contaminated!»

«He is not dead. You can see that he breathes and you can hear him groan. I will now cure him...»

«But his head has been struck! It's a crime! Who committed it?... And on the day of the lamb!» Judas is terrified.

«It was he» says Jesus pointing at Samuel, who is curled up in a corner, closer to death than the dying man, panting for breath with terror as the other man has the death-rattle in his throat, with part of his mantle over his head not to see and not to be seen, looked at with terror by everybody, except his mother, who with horror at the crime feels the torture of a guilty son already condemned by the rigid law of Israel. «*Do you see to what result a first sin leads? To this, Judas! He began by perjuring himself over the girl, then over God; he then became slanderer, liar, blasphemer, then he took to drinking and now he is a murderer. That is how one becomes subject to Satan, Judas. Always bear it in mind...*» Jesus is dreadfully solemn while He points at Samuel with His arm outstretched.

He then looks at Samuel's mother, who clinging to a shutter can hardly stand up and struck with terror seems to be dying, and He sadly says: «*Judas, that is how poor mothers are killed by no weapon other than the crimes of their sons!... I feel sorry for her. I feel sorry for mothers! I, the Son, Who will see no mercy for His Mother...*»

Jesus weeps... Judas looks at Him in bewilderment... Jesus bends over the dying man and lays His hand on his head. He prays.

The man opens his eyes. He looks stunned and amazed... but he soon revives. He sits up helping himself with his arms. He looks at Jesus and asks: «Who are You?»

«Jesus of Nazareth.»

«The Holy One! Why are You here with me! Where am I! Where is my sister and her daughter? What happened?» He tries to remember.

«Man, you called Me the Holy One. So, do you believe that I am such?»

«Yes, Lord. I do. You are the Messiah of the Lord.»

«So, is My word sacred to you?»

«Yes, Lord, it is.»

«Then...» Jesus stands up. He is imposing: «Then I, as Master and Messiah, order you to forgive. You came here and You were insulted...»

«Ah! Samuel! Of course!... The hatchet! I will denounce...» he says getting up.

«No. Forgive in the name of God. That is why I cured you. You care for Annaleah's mother because she has suffered. Samuel's mother would suffer even more. So forgive.»

The man hesitates somewhat. He looks at the injurer with evident ill-feeling. He looks at the anguished mother. He looks at Jesus Who commands him... He cannot make up his mind.

Jesus stretches His arms towards him, and draws him to His chest saying: «For My sake!»

The man begins to weep... To be thus in the arms of the Messiah, to feel His breath in his hair and a kiss where the wound was!... He weeps...

Jesus says: «Yes, is that true? You forgive him for My sake? Oh! blessed be the merciful! Weep, do weep on My Heart. Let all ill-feeling come out with your tears! All new! All pure! There you are! Be meek! Oh! meek, as a child of God ought to be...»

The man looks and, still weeping, says: «yes. Your love is so sweet! Annaleah is right! I now understand her... Woman, do not weep any more! Let bygones be bygones. No one will learn anything from my mouth. Enjoy your son, providing he can give you joy. Goodbye woman. I am going back to my house» and he is

on the point of going out.

Jesus says to him: «I am coming with you, man. Goodbye, mother. Goodbye, Abraham. Goodbye, girls.» Not a word to Samuel, who finds no word either.

His mother tears the mantle off his head, and as a result of what she suffered, she rushes upon her son: «Thank your Saviour, you heartless man! Thank Him, you worthless man!...»

«Leave him, woman. His word would be of no value. Wine makes him silly and his soul is dull. Pray for him... Goodbye.»

He goes downstairs, in the street He joins Judas and the other man, He frees Himself from old Abraham, who wants to kiss His hands, and He begins to stride out in the early moonlight.

«Do you live far from here?» He asks the man.

«At the foot of Moriah.»

«Then we must part.»

«Lord, You have preserved me for my children, my wife, my life. What shall I do for You?»

«Be good, forgive and be quiet. Never, for any reason whatsoever, are you to say one word on what happened. Will you promise?»

«I swear to it on the Sacred Temple! However, I regret I cannot say that You saved me...»

«Be just, and I will save your soul. And you will be able to say that. Goodbye, man. Peace be with you.»

The man kneels down greeting Him. They part.

«How dreadful!» says Judas now that they are alone.

«Yes. Horrible. Judas, you are not to speak either.»

«No, Lord, I will not. But why did You want me with You?»

«Are you not happy to have My confidence?»

«Oh! Very! But...»

«But because I wanted you to ponder on what falsehood, greed for money, orgy

and the lifeless practice of a religion, which is no longer felt and practised spiritually, can lead to. What did the symbolic supper mean to Samuel?

Nothing! A guzzling. A sacrilege. And through it he became homicidal. Many in future will be like him, and with the taste of the Lamb in their mouths, not of a lamb born of a sheep, but of the divine Lamb, they will commit crimes. Why? How? Are you not inquiring why? I will tell you just the same: *because they will have prepared that hour through previous deeds performed carelessly first, and stubbornly later.* Remember that, Judas.»

«Yes, Master, I will. But what shall we tell the others?»

«That a man was seriously ill. It is the truth.»

They turn the corner of a street and I no longer see them.

375. The Sabbath of the Unleavened Bread.

4th February 1946.

Many disciples, both men and women, have taken leave and have gone back to the houses where they are guests, or have set out for home again.

On this wonderful afternoon in late April only the true and proper disciples, and particularly those more devoted to preaching, have remained in Lazarus' house. That is, the shepherds, Hermas and Stephen, John the priest, Timoneus, Ermasteus, Joseph of Emmaus, Solomon, Abel of Bethlehem in Galilee, Samuel and Abel of Korazim, Agapo, Aser and Ishmael of Nazareth, Elias of Korazim, Philip of Arbela, Joseph the boatman from Tiberias, John of Ephesus, Nicolaus of Antioch. Besides the well-known women disciples, also Annaleah, Dorcas, Judas' mother, Myrtha, Anastasica and Philip's daughters have remained. I do not see Mirjiam of Jairus any longer or Jairus himself. Perhaps they have gone back to the house that offered them hospitality.

They are walking slowly in the courtyards, or on the terrace of the house, while almost all the women and all the old women disciples are around Jesus, Who is sitting near Lazarus' little bed. They are listening to Jesus Who is speaking to Lazarus, describing the villages they have been through during the last weeks before their Passover trip.

«You arrived just in time to save the little one» remarks Lazarus after hearing the story of the castle of Caesarea Philippi, pointing at the baby who is sleeping peacefully in his mother's arms. And Lazarus adds: «He is a lovely boy! Woman, will you let me see him here, near me?»

Dorcas stands up and silently but triumphantly she offers her child to the admiration of the sick man.

«A lovely boy! Really lovely! May the Lord protect him and make him grow healthy and holy.»

«And faithful to his Saviour. I would rather see him dead now, than know that he is not faithful to Him. I can stand anything, but I could not bear my son to be ungrateful to the Lord Who saved him» says Dorcas resolutely, going back to her seat.

«The Lord always arrives in time to save» says Myrtha, the mother of Abel from Bethlehem. «My son was just as close to death, and what a death!, as Dorcas' baby. But He came... and He saved. What a frightful moment!...» The very memory makes Myrtha go pale.

«So You will come in time also for me, will You not? To give me peace...» says Lazarus, caressing Jesus' hand.

«But are you not feeling a little better, brother?» asks Martha. «As from yesterday you look somewhat relieved...»

«Yes, I do. And I am surprised myself. Perhaps Jesus...»

«No, My dear friend. The fact is that I instill My peace into you. Your soul is sated with it and that dulls the pain of your body. It is God's decree that you must suffer.»

«And die. You may as well say so. Well... may His will be done, as You teach us. From now on I will not ask to be cured or relieved. I have received so much from God (and he unintentionally looks at Mary, his sister) that it is just that I should repay for what I had with my submission... ..»

«Do more than that, My dear friend. It is a great thing to be resigned and bear sorrow. But you can give it greater value.»

«Which, my Lord?»

«Offer it for the redemption of men.»

«I am a poor man myself, Master. I cannot aspire to be a redeemer.»

«You say so, but you are wrong. *God became Man to help men. But men can help God.* The deeds of the just will be united to Mine in the hour of Redemption. Of the just who died ages ago, who are still alive, or will live in future. Add yours, as from now. It is so beautiful to merge with the infinite Bounty by adding to it what we can give of our limited bounty and say: “I am cooperating too, Father, to the welfare of my brothers.” *There can be no greater love for the Lord and for our neighbour, than this ability to suffer and die to give glory to the Lord and eternal salvation to our brothers.* To save ourselves for our own sake? It is very little. It is the “least” degree of holiness. *It is beautiful to save other people, by sacrificing ourselves,* to love to such an extent as to become a sacrificing fire to save our neighbour. *Love is then perfect.* And great will be the holiness of such generous souls.»

«How beautiful that is, isn't it, sisters?» exclaims Lazarus with a dreamy smile on his thin face.

Martha, deeply moved, nods assent.

Mary, who is sat on a cushion at Jesus' feet, in her usual posture of humble ardent worshipper, says: «Am. I perhaps costing my brother such suffering? Tell me, Lord, that my anguish may be complete!...»

Lazarus exclaims: «No, Mary, no... I was to die of this. Do not pierce your heart.»

But Jesus, Who is sincere to the utmost, says: «Yes, Mary, you most certainly are! I heard the prayers and the heart-throbs of your good brother. But this must not cause a dull anguish to you, on the contrary it must urge your will to become perfect, for what you cost. And rejoice! Rejoice because Lazarus, for snatching you from the demon...»

«Not I! You did, Master.»

«... for snatching you from the demon, has deserved from God a future reward, whereby peoples and angels will speak of him. And as for Lazarus, they will speak of other people, and particularly of other women, who through their heroism have snatched the prey from Satan.»

«Who are they?» ask the women curiously, each hoping to be one.

Mary of Judas does not speak. But she looks at the Master... Jesus also looks at

her. He could beguile her, but He does not. He does not mortify her, but He does not deceive her. He replies to them: «You will know in Heaven.»

Judas' mother, who is still full of anguish asks: «And if she should not succeed, although she is willing, what will her destiny be?»

«As her good soul deserves.»

«Heaven? But, Lord, a wife, a sister, or a mother who should fail in saving those whom she loves and should see that they are damned, could she enjoy Paradise, even if she were in Paradise? Do You not think that she will never be able to rejoice because... the flesh of her flesh and the blood of her blood have deserved eternal damnation? I think that she will not be able to rejoice seeing her beloved ones in dreadful pain...»

«You are wrong, Mary. The vision of God, the possession of God are the sources of such infinite beatitude that no grief can exist for the blessed souls. While they are active and diligent in helping those who can be saved, they no longer suffer for those who are separated from God, and consequently from themselves who are in God. The Communion of saints is for the saints.»

«But if they help those who can still be saved, it means that those who are helped are not yet saints» objects Peter.

«But they have a will, at least a passive will, to be saints. The saints of God help also in material needs, to make them pass from a passive to an active will. Do you understand Me?»

«I do and I don't. For instance, supposing I were in Heaven and I saw, let us say, a fleeting kind attitude in... Eli, the Pharisee, what would I do?»

«You would find all the means to increase his kind attitude.»

«And if it did not help in any way? Then?»

«Then, when he were damned, you would be unconcerned about him.»

«And if he deserved to be damned, as he does now, but he were dear to me – which will never be the case – what should I do?»

«First of all, you had better know that you are in danger of being damned by saying that he is not dear to you and never will be; secondly you must know that, if you were in Heaven, you would pray for him and for his salvation, until the moment of his judgement. *There will be souls that will be saved at the last*

moment, after a whole life of prayer for them.»

A servant comes in saying: «Manaen has come. He wishes to see the Master.»

«Let him come. He certainly wishes to speak of some grave matter.»

The women withdraw discreetly, followed by the men. But Jesus calls back Isaac, John the priest, Stephen and Hermas, Matthias and Joseph, who are all shepherd-disciples. «It is better for you to be informed as well, since you are disciples» He explains.

Manaen enters and bows to Jesus.

«Peace to you» greets Jesus.

«Peace to You, Master. The sun is setting. My first step after the Sabbath is for You, my Lord.»

«Did you have a good Passover?»

«Good!! There can be no good where there is Herod and Herodias! I hope it was the last time that I ate the lamb with them. At the cost of my life I will not stay any longer with them!»

«I think you are making a mistake. You can serve the Master by remaining...» objects the Iscariot.

«That is true. And that is what has kept me there so far. But how nauseating! Chuza could replace me...»

Bartholomew points out to him: «Chuza is not Manaen... He wangles. He would never denounce his master. You are more sincere.»

«That is true. And what you say is true. Chuza is a courtier. He is spellbound by royalty... Royalty! What am I saying!? By the mud of royalty! But he thinks that he is a king, by being with the king... And he is terrified of royal disfavour. The other evening he looked crestfallen, when he almost crept before Herod who had sent for him after he had heard the complaints of Salome, whom You had chased away. Chuza was in dire difficulty. His desire to get out of trouble, at all costs, even by accusing You, stating that You were wrong, was clearly visible on his face. But Herod... wanted only to laugh at the girl behind her back, as he loathes her, now, as he loathes her mother. And he laughed like a madman on hearing Chuza repeat Your words. He kept saying: “Such words are by far too kind for that young... (and he uttered such an obscene word that I will not repeat it to

You). He should have trodden on her lustful breast... But He would have become contaminated!” and he laughed. Then he became grave and said: “But... the insult deserved by the woman cannot be allowed with regard to the crown. I am generous (it is his fixed idea that he is, and as nobody tells him, he does so himself) and I will forgive the Rabbi, also because He told Salome the truth. But I want Him to come to Court so that I may forgive Him completely. I want to see Him, hear Him and make Him work miracles. Let Him come and I will be His protector.” That is what he said the other evening. And Chuza did not know what to say. He did not want to say no to the monarch and he could not say yes. Because You certainly cannot yield to Herod's whims. Today he said to me: “You are certainly going to see Him... Tell Him what I want.” I have told You but I already know the answer. However, tell me, so that I may refer to him.»

«No!» A thundering no.

«Will You not make him a powerful enemy against You?» asks Thomas.

«He may become My executioner. But I can only reply: “no”.»

«He will persecute us...»

«Oh! In three days' time he will have forgotten all about it» says Manaen shrugging his shoulders. And he adds: «They have promised him... some pantomime dancers... They are arriving tomorrow... And he will forget everything!...»

The servant comes back: «Nicodemus, Joseph, Eleazar and other Pharisees and leaders of the Sanhedrin are here, Master. They wish to greet You.»

Lazarus looks at Jesus inquiringly. Jesus understands: «Let them come! I will be happy to greet them.»

Joseph comes in shortly afterwards with Nicodemus, Eleazar (the just man at Ishmael's banquet), John (the guest at the remote banquet of Joseph of Arimathea), another man whose name I hear is Joshua, a Philip, a Judas and lastly a Joachim. They seem to go on greeting forever. The room is fortunately a large one, otherwise there would be no room for so much bowing, embracing and rich vestments. But although it is so large, it becomes so full that the disciples clear out. Only Lazarus remains with Jesus. The disciples perhaps can hardly believe that they are not being looked up and down by the eyes of so many members of the Sanhedrin!

«We heard that you were in Jerusalem, Lazarus. And we came» says the one whose name is Joachim.

«I am amazed and happy. I had almost forgotten what your face looks like...» replies Lazarus somewhat ironically.

«Well... you know... We always wanted to come. But... You disappeared...»

«And you could not believe that it was true! It is in fact rather difficult to visit an unhappy fellow!»

«No! Don't say that. We... respected your desire. But now that... now that... is that right Nicodemus?»

«Yes, Lazarus. Old friends come back. Also to hear your good news and venerate the Rabbi.»

«What news have you brought me?»

«H'm... Well... The usual things... The world... Of course...» they cast sidelong glances at Jesus, Who is sitting erect on His seat, rather engrossed in thought.

«How come you are all together today, when the Sabbath is just over?»

«We had a special meeting.»

«Today?! What was so urgent?...»

The visitors look at Jesus furtively and significantly. But He is engrossed...

«There were many reasons...» they eventually reply.

«And do any concern the Rabbi?»

«Yes, Lazarus. Him as well. But we also passed judgement on a grave fact, while we were all gathered in town for the festivity...» explains Joseph of Arimathea.

«A grave fact? Which?»

«An... error of youth... H'm. Of course! A nasty discussion because... Rabbi, listen to us. You are among honest people. Although we are not Your disciples, we are not Your enemies. In the house of Ishmael You told me that I am not far from justice» says Eleazar.

«That is true. I confirm it.»

«And I defended you against Felix at Joseph's banquet» says John.

«That is also true.»

«And these people are of the same opinion as we are. Today we were summoned to decide... and we are not happy about the decision. Because we were defeated by a majority verdict. As You are wiser than Solomon, we ask You to listen to us and let us have Your opinion.» Jesus pierces them with a deep glance. He then says: «Speak.»

«Are we sure that no one can hear us? Because it is... a dreadful thing...» says the man whose name is Judas.

«Close the door and draw the curtain, and we will be in a grave» replies Lazarus.

«Master, yesterday morning You told Eleazar of Annas that for no reason whatsoever he was to become contaminated. Why did You tell him?» asks Philip.

«Because it was to be said. He does become contaminated. I do not. The holy books tell us.»

«That is true. But how do You know that he is contaminated? Did the girl perhaps speak to You before she died?» asks Eleazar.

«Which girl?»

«The girl who died after she was raped and her mother died with her, and it is not known whether grief killed them, or they committed suicide, or they were poisoned to prevent them from speaking.»

«I know nothing about that. I saw the corrupt soul of Annas' son. I smelt the stench of him. I spoke. I did not know or see anything else.»

«But what happened?» asks Lazarus with deep concern.

«Eleazar, the son of Annas, saw a girl, the daughter of a widow and... he called her saying that he had some work to give her, because they earned their living doing needlework, and... he seduced her. The girl died three days later, and her mother died, too. But before dying they told their only relative everything, notwithstanding that they had been threatened not to... And their relative went to Annas, to accuse his son, and as he was not satisfied, he told Joseph, me and other people... Annas had him arrested and put into prison. From there he will be

taken to the scaffold or he will never be free again. Today Annas wanted to have our opinion on the matter» says Nicodemus.

«He would not have asked us, if he had not known that we were already aware of the fact» grumbles Joseph between his teeth.

«Of course not... Well, with sham voting and counterfeited justice, judgement was passed on the honour and life of three unhappy people and on the punishment for the culprit» concludes Nicodemus.

«So?»

«So! It is obvious. We, who had voted for the freedom of the man and punishment for Eleazar, were threatened and expelled as being unjust. What do You say?»

«That I am horrified at Jerusalem and that the Temple is the most fetid bubo there is in Jerusalem» says Jesus slowly and fearfully. And He concludes: «And you may relate that to those of the Temple.»

«And what did Gamaliel do?» asks Lazarus.

«As soon as he heard of the fact, he covered his face and went out saying: “May the new Samson come soon to crush corrupt Philistines.”»

«He was right. And he will soon come.» There is silence.

«And was no mention made of Him?» asks Lazarus pointing at Jesus.

«Yes. Before everything else. Someone reported that You had said that the kingdom of Israel is “Mean”. So they said that You are a blasphemer, nay, a sacrilegious person. Because the kingdom of Israel comes from God.»

«Did they? And what did the Pontiff say the seducer of a virgin is? He who disgraces his ministry? Tell Me!» asks Jesus.

«He is the son of the High Pontiff. Because Annas is the real king in there» says Joachim, who is frightened by the stateliness of Jesus, Who is standing in front of him, with His arm stretched out...

«Yes. The king of corruption. And shall I not call “mean” a Country in which we have a filthy and murderous Tetrarch, a High Pontiff who is the accomplice of a seducer and murderer?...»

«Perhaps the girl committed suicide or died of grief» whispers Eleazar.

«Still murdered by her seducer... And are they not preparing now the third victim in the relative who has been imprisoned so that he may not speak? And is the altar not being desecrated by those who approach it with so many crimes? And is justice not being hushed up by enjoining silence on the too rare just members of the Sanhedrin? Yes, let the new Samson come and destroy this desecrated place, let him exterminate in order to reform!... As this wretched Country makes Me feel sick, I not only say that it is mean, but I am going away from its corrupt heart, full of nameless crimes... the very den of Satan... I am going away. Not because I am afraid of death. I will prove to you that I am not afraid. I am going away because My hour has not yet come and I do not give pearls to the swine of Israel, but I will take them to the humble people scattered in hovels, in the mountains and valleys of poor villages, where they still know how to believe and to love, if there is someone to teach them, where under coarse garments there are souls, whilst here sacred vestments and even more so the Ephod and the Pectoral cover up filthy carrions and conceal murderous weapons. Tell them that in the name of the True God I consecrate them to their condemnation and as a new Michael I drive them out of Paradise. forever. As they wanted to be gods, whereas they are demons. It is not necessary for them to die to be judged. They are already judged. With no forgiveness.»

The imposing members of the Sanhedrin and the Pharisees seem to become smaller, and in fact they cower before the dreadful wrath of the Christ, Who, on the contrary, seems to become a giant, so dazzling is His appearance and so domineering His attitude.

Lazarus moans: «Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!»

Jesus hears him and changing His tone and appearance He asks: «What is the matter, My dear friend?»

«Oh! Be not so terrible! It's no longer You! How can one hope in mercy, if You appear so dreadful?»

«And yet I will be thus, and even more, when I judge the twelve tribes of Israel. But cheer up, Lazarus. He who believes in the Christ is already judged...» And He sits down once again.

There is silence.

At last John asks: «As we preferred to be insulted rather than make a false statement against justice, how will we be judged?»

«With justice. Persevere and you will reach the place where Lazarus already is: God's friendship.»

They stand up. «Master, we are going. Peace to You. And to you, Lazarus.»

«Peace to you.»

«What was said in here, is to remain here» some of them say imploringly. «Be not afraid! Go. May God always guide you.» They go out. Jesus is left alone with Lazarus. After a short while the latter says: «How horrible!»

«Yes. How horrible!... Lazarus, I am going to arrange our departure from Jerusalem. I will be your guest at Bethany until the end of the Unleavened Bread.» And He goes out...

376. Mary Has Chosen the Better Part.

14th August 1944.

I realise at once that we are still dealing with the Magdalene, because she is the first person I see, wearing a plain pink lilac dress like the mallow flower. She is not wearing any precious ornament, her hair is plaited and collected at the back of her neck. She looks younger than when she wore sumptuous dresses. Her eyes are no longer shameless, as when she was a «sinner», neither are they discouraged as when she was listening to the parable of the lost sheep, or shameful and shining with tears as when she was in the hall of the Pharisee... Her eyes are now peaceful and they have become as clear as those of a boy and they shine with a calm look.

She is leaning against a tree near the border of the Bethany property, looking towards the road. She is waiting. She then utters a cry of joy. She turns towards the house and shouts loudly – to be heard by everybody – in her earnest unmistakable voice: «He is arriving!... Martha, they told us the truth. The Rabbi is here!» and she runs to open the heavy creaking gate. She does not give the servants time to open it and she runs out onto the road, with her arms stretched out, as does a boy towards his mother, and with a cry of loving joy: «O Rabboni!» (I am writing «Rabboni» because I see that it is spelt so in the Gospel. But every time I hear Mary call Him, she seems to be saying

«Rabboni», with an 'm' and not with an 'n') she prostrates herself at Jesus' feet, kissing them in the dust of the road.

«Peace to you, Mary. I have come to rest under your roof.»

«O my Master!» repeats Mary, looking up with an expression of respect and love, which is so meaningful... it is thanksgiving, joy, an invitation to come in, happiness because He is entering...

Jesus has laid His hand on her head and seems to be absolving her once again.

Mary stands up and walking beside Jesus she goes into the enclosure of the property. In the meantime servants and Martha have arrived, the servants with amphoras and cups. Martha with just her love, which is so great.

The apostles, who are warm, take the fresh drinks poured by the servants. They would like to give some to Jesus first, but Martha has forestalled them. She has taken a cup full of milk and has offered it to Jesus. She must be aware that He likes it very much.

After the disciples have taken some refreshments, Jesus says to them: «Go and inform the believers. I will speak to them this evening.»

The apostles scatter in various directions as soon as they are out of the garden.

Jesus proceeds between Martha and Mary.

«Come, Master» says Martha. «While waiting for Lazarus have a rest and take some refreshment.»

While they are entering a cool room which opens onto the shady porch, Mary, who had gone away quickly, comes back. She is carrying a pitcher of water and is followed by a servant with a washhand basin. But it is Mary who wants to wash Jesus' feet. She unlaces His dusty sandals and hands them to the servant to be cleaned, together with His mantle, which needs brushing. She then dips His feet in the water, which some spices have made pale pink, she dries them and kisses them. She then changes the water, and offers it to Jesus for His hands. And while waiting for the servant with the sandals, crouching on the carpet at Jesus' feet, she caresses them, and before putting His sandals on, she kisses them once again saying: «O holy feet, which have walked so far looking for me!»

Martha, who is more practical in her love, considers the human side and asks: «Master, is anybody else coming, besides Your disciples?»

And Jesus replies: «I am not sure, as yet. But you can prepare for five more people in addition to the apostles.»

Martha goes away.

Jesus goes out into the cool shady garden. He is wearing His dark-blue tunic only. His mantle, which Mary has carefully folded, is lying on a chest in the room. Mary goes out with Jesus.

They walk along well-kept paths, among blooming flowerbeds, as far as the fish-pond, which looks like a mirror lying in the greenery. The very clear water is rippled here and there by the silvery wriggling of fish and by the drizzle of a very tall slender jet in the centre of the pond. There are seats around the wide basin, which looks like a little lake with irrigation canals departing from it. Actually I think that one of the canals feeds the pond, while the other smaller ones discharge the water for irrigation purposes.

Jesus sits on a seat placed against the border of the pond. Mary sits at His feet, on the green well-kept grass. At first they do not speak. Jesus is clearly enjoying the silent restful cool garden. Mary delights in looking at Him.

Jesus plays with the clear water of the pond. He dips His fingers into it, He combs its surface forming little wakes and then He immerses His whole hand in the pure cool water. «How lovely this clear water is!» He says.

And Mary: «Do You like it so much, Master?»

«Yes, Mary. Because it is so limpid. Look. There is not the least trace of mud. The basin is full of water, but it is so clear that it does not seem to contain anything, as if the water were not a material but a spiritual element. On the bottom we can read the words which the little fish whisper to one another...»

«As one can read in the depth of pure souls. Is that right, Master?» and Mary sighs with secret regret.

Jesus perceives the stifled sigh and reads her regret disguised by a smile and He at once relieves Mary's grief.

«Mary, where do we find pure souls? It is easier for a mountain to walk than it is for a human being to be pure with the three purities. Too many things stir and ferment around adults. And it is not always possible to prevent them from penetrating inside. Only children have angelical souls, which their innocence preserves from knowledge liable to change into mud. That is why I love them so

much. I can see in them a reflection of the Infinite Purity. They are the only ones who have within themselves this remembrance of Heaven. My Mother is the Woman with a child's soul. Even more. She is the Woman with an angel's soul. As Eve was when the Father made her. Can you imagine, Mary, what the first lily in bloom in the earthly garden was like? Also these ones, which lead to this water are beautiful. But the first one, which came out of the hands of the Creator! Was it a flower or a diamond? Were they petals or plates of the most pure silver? And yet My Mother is purer than that first lily that scented the winds. And Her scent of inviolate Virgin fills Heaven and Earth, and good people will follow it in future centuries. Paradise is light, perfume, harmony. But if in it the Father did not delight in contemplating the Most Beautiful Lady Who changes the Earth into a paradise, if Paradise in future should not have the living Lily in Whose bosom are the three pistils of fire of the Divine Trinity, the light, perfume and harmony, which are the delight of Paradise, would be halved. The purity of My Mother will be the gem of Paradise. But Paradise is boundless! What would you think of a king who had but one gem in his Treasure? Even if it were the pre-eminent Gem? When I open the gates of the Kingdom of Heaven... – do not sigh, Mary, I have come for that – many souls of just people and children will come in, like a brilliant immaculate wake, behind the purple of the Redeemer. But they will be too few to populate Heaven with gems and form the citizens of the eternal Jerusalem. And later... after My Doctrine of truth and holiness has become known to men, after My Death has restored Grace to men, how could men conquer Heaven, if the poor life of men is continuously soiled with mud, which makes them impure? So, will My Paradise be populated only by children? Oh! no! One must learn how to become like a child. The Kingdom is open also to adults. Like children... That is purity. See this water? It looks so limpid. But watch: if I only stir its bottom with this rush, it becomes muddy. Waste and mud come to the surface. From clear it becomes yellowish and no one would drink it any more. But if I remove the rush, it settles and little by little it becomes once again limpid and beautiful. The rush: sin. The same applies to souls. It is repentance, believe Me, that cleanses...»

Martha arrives panting: «Are you still here, Mary? And I am so busy!... Time is flying. The guests will soon be here and there is so much to be done. The maids are busy baking bread, the servants flaying and cooking. I am preparing drinks, dishes and I am laying the tables. But the fruit is still to be picked and the honey and mint water is to be prepared...»

Mary does not pay much attention to her sister's complaints. Smiling blissfully

she continues to look at Jesus, without moving from her position.

Martha begs Jesus' help: «Master, look how hot I am. Do You think that I should be the only one to be so busy? Tell her to help me.» Martha is really annoyed.

Jesus looks at her smiling half kindly and half ironically, or rather jokingly.

Martha becomes rather impatient: «I really mean it. Look how idle she is while I am so busy. And she sees...»

Jesus becomes serious: «It is not idleness, Martha. It is love. It was idleness previously. And you wept so bitterly because of that worthless idleness. Your tears lent wings to My efforts to save her and bring her back to your honest love. Do you want to forbid her to love her Saviour? Would you prefer her to be far from here, so that she would not see you work, but would be far also from Me? Martha, Martha! Have I to say that she (and Jesus lays His hand on her head) who has come from so far, has excelled you in love? Have I to say that she, who did not know one word of love, is now learned in the science of love? Leave her to her peace! She was so ill! She is now convalescent and she is recovering by drinking what fortifies her. She was tormented so violently... Now that she has come out of her nightmare, she looks around and within herself and finds herself new and discovers a new world. Let her become certain. With her “new ego” she has to forget her past and conquer what is eternal... And the latter will not be conquered only through work, but also through adoration. He who gives a piece of bread to an apostle and a prophet will receive his reward. But double reward will be given to him who will forget to feed himself in order to love Me, because his soul will be greater than his body, a soul that will cry even louder than human needs, also when the latter are lawful and right. You worry and fret about too many things, Martha. She is concerned with one only. That which is sufficient for her soul and above all for her and your Lord. Forget useless things. Imitate your sister. Mary has chosen the better part, which will never be taken from her. When all virtues become superfluous, because they are no longer necessary to the citizens of the Kingdom, Charity alone will remain. It will last forever. Alone and supreme. That is what Mary has chosen and has taken as her shield and pilgrim's staff. Through it, as if she were flying with angelical wings, she will come to My Heaven.»

Martha, who feels mortified, lowers her head and goes away.

«My sister loves You very much and is anxious to honour You...» says Mary to

excuse her.

«I know, and she will be rewarded for that. But she needs to be purified of her human way of thinking, as this water was purified. Look how limpid it has become again, while we were speaking. Martha will be purified by the words I spoke to her. You... through the sincerity of your repentance.»

«No, through Your forgiveness, Master. My repenting was not sufficient to wash my great sin...»

«It was and will be sufficient for the sisters who will imitate you. It will be sufficient for all the poor whose souls are diseased. Sincere repentance is a purifying filter; love, then, preserves from further defilement. Thus, those who through life become adults and sinners, will be able to become as innocent as children again and enter My Kingdom like them. Let us go home now. So that Martha may not be left too long in her grief. Let us go and smile at her as Friend and sister.»

Jesus says:

«No comment is required. The parable of the water is the comment on the repenting action of hearts.

You have thus seen the complete cycle of the Magdalene. From her death to the Life. Of all the resurrected people of My Gospel she is the greatest. She was raised from seven deaths. She was reborn. You have seen her raise the stalk of her new flower higher and higher above the mud of the earth, like a flowery plant, and then bloom and smell sweetly for Me, and die for Me. You have seen her when she was a sinner, then when, thirsty, she approached the Fountain, then when she repented, then when she was forgiven, then you saw her as a lover, then as a pitiful woman bent over the slain Body of her Lord, then as a servant of My Mother, Whom she loves because She is My Mother; and finally you have seen her as a repentant soul at the threshold of her Paradise.

O souls who are afraid, learn not to be afraid of Me by reading the life of Mary of Magdala. O souls who love, learn from her how to love with seraphic ardour. O souls who have erred, learn from her the Science that will prepare you for Heaven.

I bless you all to help you to rise. Go in peace.»

377. Jesus Speaks at Bethany.**6th February 1946.**

The vision dated 14th August 1944: The sheep in the fold at the feet of the Good Shepherd, is to be put before this chapter.

Jesus is at Bethany and the fertile country is full of blossoms and flowers in this beautiful month of Nisan, which is so serene and clear that creation seems to have been cleansed of all filthiness. But the crowds who have been looking for Him in Jerusalem and do not wish to go away without hearing Him, to take away in their hearts His words, soon find Him. And they are so numerous that Jesus orders His disciples to gather them all together, so that He may teach them. And the twelve apostles and the seventy-two disciples, who have formed a group of approximately that number with the new disciples who joined them recently, spread out in all directions to carry out His instructions.

In the meantime Jesus, in Lazarus' garden, takes leave of the women, and particularly of His Mother, as they are all going back to Galilee, as instructed by Him, escorted by Simon of Alphaeus, Jairus, Alphaeus of Sarah, Marjiam, Susanna's husband and Zebedee. They greet one another and weep. Many wish they did not have to obey. A desire brought about by their love for the Master. But the power of their perfect love for the Most Holy Word, being entirely supernatural, is stronger, and that power makes them obey and accept the painful separation.

The one who speaks least is Mary, His Mother. But Her countenance is more eloquent than all the words of the others put together. Jesus understands Her grief, and He reassures and comforts Her, overwhelming Her with caresses, if a mother, and particularly that Mother, can ever be overwhelmed, as She is full of love and in great distress for Her persecuted Son. And the women depart at last, turning round several times to greet the Master, their sons and the lucky Judaeans women disciples who are still staying with the Master.

«They have suffered in going away...» remarks Simon Zealot.

«But it is better that they have gone, Simon.»

«Do You foresee sad days?»

«Troubled, at least. Women cannot bear fatigue as we do. In any case, now that I have almost as many Judaeans as Galileans, it is better if they are divided. They will have Me in turns, and in turns they will have the joy of serving Me, and I the consolation of their holy love.»

The crowds are continuously increasing in numbers. The orchard between Lazarus' house and that which belonged to the Zealot is swarming with people. There are people of all castes and conditions, as well as Pharisees from Judaea, members of the Sanhedrin and veiled women. The members of the Sanhedrin who on Passover Sabbath had called on Lazarus in Jerusalem, come out of Lazarus' house, with other people, in one group, close to a litter in which Lazarus is carried. When passing by, Lazarus waves his hand and smiles happily at Jesus. And Jesus returns the salutation, while He follows the little procession to where the people are waiting for Him.

The apostles join Him and Judas Iscariot, who has been exulting for some days, in a very happy mood, turns his very dark bright eyes here and there and reports to Jesus what he discovers.

«Oh! look! There are also some priests!... Look! There is also Simon of the Sanhedrin. And there is Helkai. What a liar! Only a few months ago he used to speak evil of Lazarus, and now he pays his respects to him as if he were a god!... And Doro the Elder and Trison are over there. See? He is greeting Joseph. And Samuel the scribe with Saul... And Gamaliel's son! And over there there is a group of Herodians... And that group of women with veils... must be the Roman ladies... They are standing on one side, but look how they are watching where You are going, so that they can change place and hear You! I recognise them notwithstanding their large mantles. See? Two are tall, one is broader than taller, the others are of middle height, but well shaped. Shall I go and greet them?»

«No. They have come here as strangers, as anonyms who wish to hear the word of the Rabbi. We must consider them as such.»

«As You wish, Master. I wanted to remind... Claudia of her promise...»

«It is not necessary. And even if it were, we must never become beggars, Judas. Is that right? Heroism in faith is to be perfected among difficulties.»

«It was for Your sake, Master.»

«And for your everlasting idea of a human triumph. Do not cherish false hopes, Judas. Neither with regard to My future behaviour, nor with regard to promises you have received.. You believe in what you say to yourself. But nothing will be able to change the thought of God, which is, that I am Redemeer and King of a spiritual Kingdom.»

Judas does not reply.

Jesus is now in His place, in the middle of the apostles. Lazarus is in his little bed, almost at His feet. Not far from Him there are the Judaeen women disciples, that is Lazarus' sisters, Eliza, Anastasica, Johanna with the children, Annaleah, Sarah, Marcella, Nike. The Roman ladies, or at least those pointed out by Judas as such, are a little behind, almost at the end, mingled in a group of common people. Members, of the Sanhedrin, Pharisees, scribes, priests are in the first row, which is unavoidable. But Jesus begs them to make room for three small litters with sick people, whom Jesus asks questions, but He does not cure them at once.

Jesus, as a starting point for His speech, draws the attention of the audience to the large number of birds that nestle in the trees in Lazarus' garden and in the orchard where His listeners are gathered.

«Watch them. Some are indigenous, some exotic, they are of all breeds and sizes. And when it gets dark, they will be replaced by night birds, which are also very numerous, although we are inclined to forget about them, because we do not see them. Why so many birds here? Because they find what they need to live happily: sunshine, peace, plenty foodstuff, safe shelter, cool water. And they gather coming here from east and west, north and south, if they are migrant birds, and they stay here permanently if they are indigenous. So? Shall we thus see that the birds of the air exceed the sons of man in wisdom? How many of these birds are the young ones of birds that are now dead, but last year or farther back in time, built their nests here and were happy here. They told their little ones, before dying. They showed them this place and the young ones obeyed and came here. The Father, Who is in Heaven, the Father of all men, did He perhaps not tell His saints the truth, did He not give them all the necessary instructions for the welfare of His children? All the instructions: those concerning the welfare of the body and those concerning the welfare of the spirit. But what do we see? We see that while what was taught for the health of

the body – from the hide tunics, which He made for the First Parents, stripped in their own eyes of the dress of innocence, which was torn by sin, to the latest discoveries made by man through the light of God – is remembered, handed down and taught, the rest, which was taught, ordered and pointed out for the spirit, is not kept, or taught or practised.»

Many people of the Temple begin to whisper. Jesus calms them with a gesture.

«The Father, Whose goodness exceeds by far man's understanding, sent His Servant to remind men of His teaching, to gather birds in healthy places, to give them clear knowledge of what is useful and holy, to establish the Kingdom, where every angelical bird, every soul, will find grace and peace, wisdom and health. And I solemnly tell you that as the birds born in this place, in springtime will say to the birds of other places: “Come with us, because there is a good place where you will enjoy peace and the bounty of the Lord”, and thus next year new birds will be seen gathering here, in the same way, we shall see numerous spirits rush from every part of the world, as predicted by the prophets, towards the Doctrine, which has come from God, and towards the Saviour, the founder of the Kingdom of God. But the day-birds are mixed in this place with night-birds, which are birds of prey, disturbers and quite capable of terrifying and killing the good little birds. And those birds have been such for years, for generations, and nothing can flush them, because they work in darkness and in places impenetrable by man. They work in darkness, with their cruel eyes, their silent flights, their voracity, their cruelty and unclean as they are, they spread filth and sorrow.

To whom shall we compare them? To those who in Israel do not want to accept the Light that has come to illuminate darkness, the Word that has come to teach, Justice that has come to sanctify. I have come for them in vain. Nay, I am the cause of sin for them, because they persecute Me and My faithful believers. So what shall I say? What I have already said many a time: “Many will come from east and west and will sit with Abraham and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven. But the children of this kingdom will be thrown out into the dark.”»

«The children of God in the dark? You are blaspheming!» shouts one of the hostile members of the Sanhedrin. It is the first sprinkle of the slaver of the reptiles, who have been silent for too long and who can no longer be quiet, otherwise they would be drowned in their own poison.

«Not the children of God» replies Jesus.

«You said so! You said: “The children of this kingdom will be thrown out into the dark.”»

«And I repeat it. The children of this kingdom. The kingdom that is ruled by flesh, blood, avarice, fraud, lust, crime. But that is not My Kingdom. My Kingdom is the Kingdom of Light. Yours is the kingdom of darkness. Righteous spirits, including those that at present are heathens, idolaters, despised by Israel, will come to the Kingdom of Light from east and west, north and south. And they will live in holy communion with God, having accepted the light of God within themselves, while waiting to ascend to the true Jerusalem, where there are no tears, no sorrow and above all no falsehood. The Falsehood that now rules over the world of darkness and gluts its children to such extent that they cannot hold a tiny beam of the divine Light. Oh! Let the new children come and replace the disowning children! Let them come! And wherever they come from, they will be enlightened by God and will reign forever and ever!»

«You have spoken to insult us!» shout the hostile Judaeans.

«I spoke to tell you the truth.»

«Your power lies in Your language, by which You, the new snake, allure and mislead the crowds.»

«My power is the strength that comes to Me by being One with My Father.»

«Blasphemer!» shout the priests.

«Saviour! You, who are lying at My feet, what are you suffering from?»

«I broke my spine when I was a child and I have been lying on my back for thirty years.»

«Rise and walk! And what are you suffering from, woman?»

«My legs have been hanging lifelessly since my son, who now carries me about with my husband, was born» and she points at a young man who is at least sixteen years old.

«Rise, too, and praise the Lord. And why is that child not walking by himself?»

«Because he was born feeble-minded, blind, deaf and dumb. He is a lump of breathing flesh» explain those who are with the poor child.

«In the Name of God, have intelligence, speech, sight and hearing. I want it!»

And after working the third miracle, He turns to His enemies and asks: «What do you say now?»

«Dubious miracles. Why do You not cure Your friend and supporter, if You can do anything?»

«Because God wants otherwise.»

«Ah! Ah! God! A fine excuse! If we bring You a sick man, nay, two, will You cure them?»

«I will, if they deserve it.»

«Wait then» and they go away quickly, grinning sarcastically.

«Be careful, Master! They may set a trap for You» some say.

Jesus makes a gesture as if He wanted to say: «Let them do as they like!» and He bends to caress the children, who little by little have approached Him, leaving their relatives. Some mothers imitate them, taking to Him those who are not yet steady in their first steps or sucklings.

«Bless our children, Blessed One, because we are lovers of the Light!» say the mothers.

And Jesus imposes His hands, blessing them. That brings about a bustle in the crowd. All those with children want the same blessing and they push and shout to make their way through the crowd. The apostles, both because they have been irritated by the usual mischievousness of scribes and Pharisees, and because they feel pity for Lazarus, who risks being carried away by the wave of relatives taking their little ones to the divine blessing, become impatient and shout reproaching and pushing back this one and that one, particularly the little children who have come by themselves. But Jesus says kindly and lovingly: «No, do not do that! Never prevent children from coming to Me, nor their relatives from bringing them to Me. Because the Kingdom is of these innocent souls. They will not be guilty of the great Crime, and they will grow up in My Faith. Let Me therefore consecrate them to it. Their angels are leading them to Me.»

Jesus is now in the middle of a crowd of children looking at Him ecstatically; so many little faces looking up at Him, so many innocent eyes, so many little smiling mouths...

The veiled ladies take advantage of the confusion to go round at the rear of the crowd and come behind Jesus, as if they were urged by curiosity to do so.

The Pharisees and scribes come back with two sick people who seem to be suffering from severe pain. One particularly is moaning in his little litter, and is completely covered with a mantle. The other one, apparently, is not so seriously ill, but is certainly very ill, because he is reduced to a skeleton and is panting.

«Here are our friends. Cure them. They are really ill. Particularly that one!» and they point to the moaning one.

Jesus lowers His eyes and looks at the sick people, He then looks up at the Jews. He darts a dreadful look at His enemies. Standing behind the group of innocent children, who do not reach up to His groin, He seems to be rising from a wreath of purity, to be the Avenger, as if from that purity He were drawing the strength to be so. He opens His arms and shouts: «Liars! That man is not ill! I tell you! Uncover him! Or he will be really dead in a moment, for attempting to deceive God.»

The man jumps out of his litter shouting: «No, no! Don't strike me! Here, you cursed ones, take your money!» and he throws a purse at the feet of the Pharisees and takes to his heels...

The crowds howl, laugh, boo, applaud...

The other sick man says: «And what about me, Lord? They forced me out of my bed and they have been using violence on me since this morning... But I did not know that I was in the hands of Your enemies...»

«Be cured, poor son, and may you be blessed!» and He imposes His hands on him, after making His way through the children.

The man lifts for a moment the blanket covering his body and he looks at I do not know what... He then stands up. He is nude from his thighs downwards. And he shouts and shouts until he becomes hoarse: «My foot! My foot! But who are You, Who can give back what was lost?» and he throws himself at Jesus' feet. He then stands up, jumps precariously on his little litter shouting: «My disease was eating away my bones. The doctor had torn off my toes, he had cauterised my flesh and had cut me up to the bone of my knee. Look! Look at the scars. But I was going to die just the same. And now... It is all cured! My foot has been restored... It is no longer painful! I feel well... strong... My chest is free... My heart is sound! Oh! mother! I am coming to share my joy with you!»

He begins to run away. But gratitude stops him. He goes back to Jesus and he kisses His blessed feet repeatedly, until Jesus, caressing his head, says to him: «Go! Go to your mother and be good.»

He then looks at His enemies, who have been held up to ridicule and says: «And now? What should I do to you? What should I do, people, after this ordeal?»

The crowds shout: «Let the offenders of God be stoned! Death to them! No more snares for the Holy One! May you be cursed!» and they begin picking up lumps of earth, branches, little stones, ready to throw them.

Jesus stops them. «That is the word of the crowds. That is their answer. Mine is different. I say: Go away! I will not soil My hands striking you. The Most High will take care of you. He is My defence against the wicked.»

The culprits, instead of being silent, do not hesitate to offend the Master, and although they are afraid of the people, they shout foaming with anger: «We are Judaeans and we are powerful! We order You to go away. We forbid You to teach. We banish You. Go away! Enough of You. The power is in our hands and we are making use of it; and we will use it more and more, persecuting You, cursed usurper...»

They are about to say more in a tumult of cries, tears, hisses, when the tallest veiled woman comes forward, placing herself between Jesus and His enemies with swift imperious movement, with even more imperious countenance and voice; she uncovers her face and her sentence drops sharper and more lashing than a whip on galley-slaves or an axe on a neck: «Which of you is forgetting that he is a slave of Rome?» She is Claudia. She lowers her veil again. She bows lightly to the Master. She goes to her place. It was enough.

The Pharisees calm down at once. One only, on behalf of everybody, says with creeping servility: «Forgive us, domina! But He is upsetting the old spirit of Israel. As you are powerful, you should forbid Him and get the brave just Proconsul to forbid Him to do so; long life and health to him!»

«That does not concern us. It is enough that He does not disturb the order of Rome. And He does not!» replies scornfully the patrician, who then gives a sharp order to her companions and goes away towards a thicket of trees at the end of the path and disappears behind it. She reappears in a creaky covered wagon, all the curtains of which she has ordered to be lowered.

«Are You happy now that You had us insulted?» ask the Judaeans, Pharisees,

scribes and their companions, making a fresh attack.

The crowds shout contemptuously. Joseph, Nicodemus and all those who have proved to be friends – among them there is Gamaliel's son, who has not joined them but has spoken the same words – feel that they must interfere and reproach the others for passing all bounds. The altercation thus passes from Jesus' enemies to the two opposite groups, leaving out the One most interested in it. Jesus is silent, with arms folded, listening, and I think that He emanates a power to hold the crowds back and particularly the apostles, who are beside themselves with rage.

«We must defend ourselves and other people» shouts a hot-headed Jew.

«We are tired of seeing fascinated crowds run after Him» says another one.

«We are the powerful ones! Nobody else! We are the only ones to be listened to and followed» cries a scribe.

«Away from here! Jerusalem is ours!» shouts a priest as red as beetroot.

«You are wicked!»

«You are more than blind!»

«The crowds have left you, because you deserve it.»

«Be holy if you want to be loved. If you vex and insult people, you lose your power, which is based on the reputation of the people for its governors!» shout those of the opposite party and many of the crowd.

«Silence!» orders Jesus. And when there is silence, He says: «Oppression and imposition cannot change love or the consequences of good received. I gather what I gave: love. By persecuting Me, you only increase such love, which compensates Me for your indifference. In all your wisdom, do you not know that to persecute a doctrine serves no other purpose but to increase its power, particularly when the doctrine in actual fact corresponds to what it teaches? Listen to a prophecy of Mine, people of Israel. The more you persecute the Rabbi of Galilee and His followers, trying to destroy by violence His Doctrine, which is divine, the more you will help it to thrive and spread throughout the world. Every drop of blood of the martyrs killed by you, hoping to triumph and reign with your corrupt hypocritical laws and precepts, which no longer correspond to the Law of God, every tear of saints oppressed by you, will become the seed of future believers. And you will be defeated just when you

think that you are going to triumph. Go. I am going as well. Those who love Me should look for Me at the borders of Judaea and beyond the Jordan, or they can wait for Me there, because like lightning flashing from east to west, so fast will be the movement of the Son of man, until He ascends the altar and the throne, new Pontiff and King, and will remain there firmly in the presence of the world, of creation and of Heaven, in one of His many epiphanies, which only good people can understand.»

The hostile Pharisees and their companions have gone. All the others have remained. Gamaliel's son struggles against himself to come to Jesus, but he goes away without speaking...

«Master, You will not hate us because we belong to the same castes as they do?» asks Eleazar.

«I never strike with anathema a single person only because his class is guilty. Be not afraid» replies Jesus.

«They will now hate us...» whispers Joachim.

«That will be an honour for us!» exclaims John, the member of the Sanhedrin.

«May God fortify wavering souls and bless strong ones. I bless everybody in the name of the Lord» and opening His arms He gives the Mosaic blessing to all the people present.

He then takes leave of Lazarus, his sisters, Maximinus, the women disciples, and He sets out... The green country on the sides of the road to Jericho receives Him while its green is growing red in a glorious sunset.

378. Towards Mount Adomin.

7th February 1946.

«It is getting dark, where are we going?» the apostles ask one another. They are talking in low voices of what happened. They are not saying anything loud, as they do not want to depress the Master, Who is clearly very pensive.

Night falls while they proceed, following the Master Who is still very serious. A village appears at the foot of a chain of very rough mountains.

«Let us stop here for the night» orders Jesus. «Or rather, you stop here. I will go up those mountains to pray...»

«By Yourself? Ah! no! You are not going by Yourself up Mount Adomin! With all those thieves who are lying in wait for You, no, You are not going!...» says Peter quite firmly.

«What can they do to Me? I have nothing!»

«You have... Yourself. I am talking of the real thieves, of those who hate You. And Your life is quite enough for them. You are not going to be killed like... like... thus, I mean, in a cowardly ambush. You would give Your enemies the opportunity to invent goodness knows what story to divert the crowds also from Your doctrine» insists Peter.

«Simon of Jonah is right; Master. They would be quite capable of getting rid of Your body and then saying that You have fled because You had realised that You had been unmasked. Or... they could even take You to places of evil fame, to the house of a prostitute, and then say. “See where and how He died? In a quarrel over a prostitute.” You quite rightly said: “To persecute a doctrine is to increase its power” and I noticed that Gamaliel's son, whose sight I never lost, was nodding assent while You were saying so. But it is also right to say that to hold a saint and his doctrine up to ridicule is the safest weapon to confute his doctrine and make him lose the esteem of the crowds» says Judas Thaddeus.

«Of course. And that must not happen to You» concludes Bartholomew.

«Don't lend Yourself to the tricks of Your enemies. Consider that not only You would be damaged, but also the Will of Him Who sent You would be made void by such imprudence, and one would see that the children of Darkness have defeated, at least temporarily, the children of Light» adds the Zealot.

«That's right! You always say, and You pierce our hearts, that You will be killed. I remember when You reproached Simon Peter and I will not say to You: “Let that never happen.” But I do not think that I am Satan if I say: “At least let that be to Your glorification, as unequivocal seal of Your Holiness, and definite conviction of Your enemies. So that the crowds may know and have valid reasons to distinguish and believe.” At least that, Master. The holy mission of the Maccabees never appeared so holy as when Judas, the son of Mattathias,

died as a hero and saviour in the battlefield. Do You want to go up Mount Adomin? We will come with You. We are Your disciples! Where You go as our Head, we will come as Your ministers» says Thomas, and I have seldom heard him speak with such solemn eloquence.

«That is very true! And if they attack You, they will have to attack us first» several of them say.

«Oh! They will not attack us so easily! They are curing the smart of Claudia's words and... they are very... too cunning! They must certainly consider that Pontius would know whom to punish for Your death. They have betrayed themselves in the eyes of Claudia and they will ponder over that and think of traps more reliable than vulgar aggression. Perhaps it is foolish of us to be afraid. We are no longer the poor unknown people of the past. There is Claudia now!» says the Iscariot.

«Very well... But don't let us run any risk. What do You want to do on Mount Adomin?» asks James of Zebedee.

«I want to pray and find a place where you can all pray in the next days, to be ready for fresh fiercer and fiercer struggles.»

«Against our enemies?»

«Also against our egos. I am in great need of being fortified.»

«But did You not say that You wanted to go to the borders of Judaea and beyond the Jordan?»

«Yes, and I will. But after praying. I will go to Achor and then to Jericho via Doco.»

«No, Lord! They are inauspicious places for the saints of Israel. Don't go there. I tell You, I can feel it! There is something within me that tells me. Don't go! In the name of God, don't go!» shouts John, who seems to be on the point of losing consciousness, as if he were seized by ecstatic fear... They all look at him in amazement, as they have never seen him thus before. But no one sneers at him. They all feel that they are in the presence of a supernatural fact and they respectfully remain silent.

Jesus also is silent until He sees John regain his normal composure and hears him say: «O my Lord! How much I suffered!»

«I know. We shall go to Mount Cherith. What does your spirit say?» I am deeply impressed by the respect with which Jesus addresses His inspired apostle...

«You are asking me, Lord? You, the Most Holy Wisdom, are asking a poor foolish boy!»

«Yes, I am asking you. The least is the greatest when he humbly communicates with his Lord for the welfare of his brothers. Tell Me.»

«Yes, Lord. Let us go to Mount Cherith. There are gorges there where we can safely collect our thoughts in meditation, and the roads to Jericho and Samaria are not far. We will descend the mountain to gather those who love You and hope in You and we will bring them to You, or take You to them, and we will also nourish our souls with prayer... And the Lord will descend and speak to our spirits... and will open our ears, which hear the Word but do not fully understand Him... and above all will inflame our hearts with His fire. Because only if we are aflame, shall we be able to bear the torments of the Earth. *Because only if we first suffer the sweet martyrdom of total love, shall we be ready to suffer the torture of human hatred...* Lord... what have I said?»

«My words, John. Be not afraid. Let us stop here then, and tomorrow at dawn we will go up the mountains.»

379. After the Retreat upon Mount Cherith.

9th February 1946.

It is occasionally possible to catch glimpses of parts of the Dead Sea, which lies to the south of the place where the apostles are with the Master, from a group of mountains, which seem intent on rising more and more. And, I would say, every phase of their effort is marked by a rough chain of rocky hills, with sheer sloping sides, severed by narrow valleys similar to gigantic slashes and crowned with wild peaks. It is not possible to see the Jordan and its peaceful fertile valley, or Jericho or other towns. One can see nothing but mountains rising towards Samaria, and the gloomy Dead Sea through the narrow gorge between two acuminated mountains. Down in the valley there is a stream flowing from

west to east towards the Jordan. There is loud screeching of hawks and croaking of ravens in the bright blue sky. Many birds are chirping among the branches of the wild slopes. The winds whisper as mellow as flutes among the gorges, carrying remote scents and noises, or overwhelming those which are near, according to whether they are light or strong. An odd harness-bell is heard now and again from the road, which must be down in the valley. One can also hear the bleating of sheep grazing on the tablelands and the noise of water dripping from rocks or murmuring in torrents. But the season is good, dry and mild, the mountain sides are covered with bright flowers standing out against the emerald green of the grass, and bunches of flowers and festoons hang from tree trunks and branches and the sight of the place is most pleasant.

The faces of the thirteen men gathered there are very happy, shining with a supernatural happiness. The world has been forgotten... It is remote...

Their spirits have recovered from many shocks, they are once again in the halo of God, that is, in peace. And peace is visible on their countenances. But the rest is over, and Jesus tells them so. And Peter repeats his prayer of Mount Tabor: «Oh! Why do we not stop here? It is beautiful to be here with You!»

«Because there is work awaiting us, Simon of Jonah. We cannot be only contemplative. The world is waiting for our teaching. The workers of the Lord cannot stop when there are fields to be sown.»

«Then... since I become a little good only when I live apart as now, I will never be able to... The world is so great! How shall we be able to work it all and then concentrate on You before dying?»

«You will certainly not work it all. It will take hundreds and hundreds of years. And when a part has been worked, Satan will go there to spoil what has been done. It will thus be a continuous work lasting until the end of the world.»

«Well, then, how shall I be able to be ready to die?» Peter is really depressed.

Jesus reassures him embracing him and says: «You will have time. It does not take long. An act of perfect concentration is sufficient to prepare you to appear before God. And you will have all the time you need. In any case you must realise that by fulfilling the will of God one is always preparing to die in holiness. If God wants you to be active and you obey, you are preparing better by obeying than you would by retiring among the most solitary rocks to pray and meditate. Are you convinced?»

«Certainly! You say So! So what shall we do?»

«Go along the roads in the valley. Gather together those who are waiting for Me and preach the Lord and Faith until I come.»

«Are You remaining alone here?»

«Of course. Be not afraid. You can see that at times evil is of some help to good. Elijah here was fed by crows. We can say that fierce vultures fed us.»

«Do You think that it was a kind of beginning of conversion?»

«No. But charity, although it was urged by the consideration that by treating us generously, they would put us in a situation not to betray them...»

«But we would not have betrayed them!» exclaims Andrew.

«No. But the wretched thieves do not know that. There is no spiritual feeling in them, laden as they are with crimes.»

«Lord, You were saying that charity... What were You going to say?» asks John.

«I wanted to say: the fact that they treated us charitably will be rewarded, at least among the better ones. The conversion, which did not take place now, may work slowly, but it can take place. That is why I said to you: “Do not refuse their offerings.” And I accepted them although I smelt the stench of sin in them.»

«But You did not eat any...»

«But I did not mortify the sinners by rejecting them. They had initial good feeling. Why destroy it? That torrent down there, does it not originate in the spring that trickles from that crag? Always remember that. It is a lesson for your future life, when I shall no longer be among you. If in your apostolic travels you should come across criminals, do not behave like Pharisees, who despise everybody, and they do not consider that they should despise themselves first, corrupt as they are. But approach them with great love. I would like to be able to say with “infinite love.” Nay, I say so. And that is possible, although man is “finite, limited” in his acts and actions.

Do you know how man can possess infinite love? By being so united to God, as to be all one with God. Then, as the creature disappears in the Creator, it is the Creator Who really acts, and He is infinite. And My apostles must be like that, all one with their God through the power of love, which is so close to the Origin

as to dissolve in it. *It is not the way in which you speak, but the way is which you love, that will convert hearts.* Will you find sinners? *Love them.* Will you suffer because of disciples who go astray? *Try to save them through love.* Remember the parable of the lost sheep. Oh! forever and ever it will be the sweet appeal made to sinners. But it will also be the definite order given to My priests. With every artifice, with every sacrifice, at the cost of losing your own lives in the attempt to save a soul, you must patiently go and look for those who are lost and bring them back to the Fold. Love will give you joy. It will say to you: “Be not afraid.” It will give you such a power to expand all over the world, as I did not possess Myself. No longer is the love of future just people to be set as a seal on the heart and on the arm, as the Song of Songs says. But it is to be set in the heart. It must be the spur urging souls to all actions. And each action must be superabundance of charity, which is no longer satisfied with loving God or one's neighbor only mentally, but it enters the lists against the enemies of God, to love God and neighbor concretely, also through material deeds, which lead to wider and more perfect actions aiming at the redemption and sanctification of brothers.

Through contemplation one loves God, through action one loves one's neighbor, but the two loves are not separated, because there is one only love, and loving our neighbor we love God Who orders this love and gave us our neighbor as a brother. Neither you nor future priests will be able to say that you are My friends, if your charity and theirs is not entirely devoted to the salvation of souls, for whom I became incarnate and for whom I will suffer. I give you the example of how one must love. But you and those who will come after you, must do what I do. The new time has come. The time of love. I have come to cast this fire to hearts and it will grow greater after My Passion and Ascension, and it will inflame you when the Love of the Father and of the Son descends to consecrate you to your ministry.

Most Divine Love! Why do You delay in consuming the Victim, in opening the eyes and ears, in loosening the tongues and limbs of this flock of Mine, so that they may go among wolves and teach that God is Charity, and that he who has no charity is a brute and a demon? “Oh! come, most sweet and strong Spirit, and inflame the other Christs to them, like Me, that is, anointed by love, active for love, holy and sanctifying through love.”

Blessed are those who love, because they will be loved, and their souls will never stop singing to God together with the angels until they will sing the

eternal glory in the light of Heaven. So be it for you, My friends. Now go and do with love what I told you.»

380. The Parable of the Unfaithful Steward. Essenes and Pharisees.

10th February 1946.

Waiting for the Master many people are scattered over the lower slopes of a rather isolated mountain, which rises from intertwined valleys surrounding it; in certain places the slopes rise sheer from the valleys. To reach the top there is a path cut in the calcareous rock like a scratch winding up the slope. In some parts the borders of the path are the steep incline of the mountain on one side, and a deep precipice on the other. And the dark yellowish-red rugged path, looks like a ribbon thrown among the low dusty-green thorny bushes, full of aculei; I would say the aculei are the very leaves that cover the arid rocky slopes and adorn themselves with bright violet-red flowers, like tassels or flocks of silk torn from the garment of some unfortunate person who happened to pass along the thicket of thorn bushes. And this blue-green tormenting vegetation, full of sharp thorns, is as sad as if it were spread with impalpable ashes and extends in stripes also at the foot of the mountain and in the plain between the mountain and other mountains, both north-west and south-east, alternating with places where there are real bushes and real grass, which are neither tormenting nor useless.

The crowds have camped on the green grass, patiently waiting the arrival of the Master. It must be the day after the speech to the apostles, because it is a cool morning and the dew has not yet evaporated from all the stems. It particularly decorates those thorns and leaves which are in the more shady spots, transforming the quaint flowers of the thorny bushes into tassels studded with diamonds. This is certainly the beauty hour for the sad mountain. Because during the other hours, in the scorching sun or in moonlit nights, it must look like a horrible place of hellish expiation. A large wealthy town can be seen to the east, in the very fertile plain. Nothing else is visible from this hillside, which is still low, where the pilgrims are, but from the top the eye must enjoy a wonderful sight of the nearby districts. Taking into account the height of the mountain I think that one's eyes would rove over the Dead Sea and the area to

the east of it, as far as the mountain chains of Samaria and those that hide Jerusalem. But I have not been to the top, so...

The apostles are moving about among the crowds, trying to keep them quiet and orderly and to put sick people in the best places. They are assisted by some disciples, perhaps those who are active in that locality and had led to the borders of Judaea the pilgrims anxious to hear the Master.

Jesus appears all of a sudden. He is wearing a white linen tunic and a red mantle, to make the heat of the sunny days compatible with the coolness of the nights, as we are not yet in summer. He has not yet been seen and He looks at the crowds waiting for Him and smiles. He seems to be coming from behind the eastern side of the mountain, half-way up the hill, and He comes down quickly along the difficult path.

It is a boy, who, either because he was looking at the flight of birds nestling among the bushes and which take off when a stone rolls down the mountain side and frightens them, or because his eyes were attracted by the sudden appearance, sees Jesus and bouncing to his feet shouts: «The Lord!»

They all turn round and see Jesus, Who is now about two hundred metres away. They start running towards Him, but with a gesture of His arm and with His voice, which is heard clearly, perhaps because it is echoed by the mountain, He says: «Remain where you are.» And smiling all the time He comes down as far as those waiting for Him and stops at the highest spot of the tableland. He greets them from there: «Peace to everybody» and with a particular smile He repeats His salutation to the apostles and disciples who have gathered round Him.

Jesus is beaming with beauty. With the sun in front of Him and the greenish hillside behind His back, He looks like the vision of a dream. The hours spent in solitude, something unknown to us, or perhaps an overflow on Him of fatherly caresses, I do not know what, accentuate His ever perfect beauty, they make it glorious, imposing, peaceful, serene, I would say joyful, as becomes a person who comes back from a tryst and whose countenance, smiles and eyes show all his happiness. The evidence of this divine encounter shines infinitely more brightly than can normally be seen after the meeting of poor human lovers, and the Christ appears dazzling with it. And He subdues all the people present who contemplate Him silently with admiration, as if they were intimidated by the intuition of a mysterious reunion of the Most High with His Word... It is a secret, a secret hour of love between the Father and the Son. No one will ever

know it. But the Son keeps its seal, as if, after being the Word of the Father, as He is in Heaven, He could hardly be once again the Son of man. Infinity, sublimity find it difficult to become «the Man» again. Divinity overflows, explodes, radiates from Humanity like sweet oil from a porous earthen jar or like the light of a furnace through the veil of ground glass.

And Jesus lowers His beaming eyes, His blissful face, He conceals His wonderful smile, bending over the sick people, whom He caresses and cures while they are seized with astonishment looking at the bright loving face bent over their misery to make them happy. But at last He must stand up and show the crowds the Face of the Peaceful, Holy One, of the God Incarnate, still wrapped in the brightness of the ecstasy. He repeats: «Peace to you.» Even His voice is more melodious than usual, as it resounds with sweet triumphant notes... It spreads powerfully over the silent listeners, searching for their hearts, caressing them, shaking them and inviting them to love.

Everybody is deeply moved, with the exception of that group of Pharisees, who are more arid, coarse, prickly and harsh than the mountain itself and are standing like statues full of incomprehension and hatred in a corner, and with the exception of the other group, all dressed in white and standing aloof, listening from a brow and whom Bartholomew and the Iscariot point out as «Essenes». And Peter grumbles: «And so there is another extra fowl-run of hawks!»

«Oh! Never mind. The Word is for everybody!» says Jesus, smiling at Peter, referring to the Essenes.

He then begins to speak.

«It would be lovely if man were as perfect as the Father in Heaven wants him. Perfect in every thought, affection, deed. But man does not know how to be perfect and misuses the gifts of God, Who has given freedom of action to man, ordering, however, good things, advising perfect things, so that man might not say: “I did not know.”

What use does man make of the freedom given to him by God? The greatest part of men use it as a child would; or as a fool; the rest use it as criminals. Then death comes and man is subject to the Judge Who asks severely: “How did you use or misuse what I gave you?” A dreadful question! How less worthy than motes will then look the goods of the Earth, for which man so often becomes a sinner! Poor in eternal misery, divested of a garment that nothing can replace, he will stand dejected and trembling before the Majesty of the Lord, and will find

no word to justify himself. Because it is easy to justify oneself, deceiving poor men. But that cannot happen in Heaven. God cannot be deceived. Never. And God does not resort to any compromise. Never.

Now, then. How can one be saved? How can man make everything be of use to his salvation, even what has originated from Corruption, which taught men to use metals and gems as instruments of wealth and fostered their eager desire for power and pleasure of the flesh? So will man, who, however poor he may be, can always sin by desiring gold, offices, women immoderately, – and at times he becomes the thief of such things to have what rich people have – so will man, rich or poor as he may be, never be able to save himself? Of course he will. How? *By exploiting wealth on behalf of Good; exploiting misery on behalf of Good.* The poor man who is not envious, who does not curse, who does not attempt to take what belongs to other people, but is happy with what he has, exploits his humble condition in order to achieve future holiness, and in actual fact, *most poor people know how to do that.* But the rich are not so capable, as wealth is a continuous trap, set by Satan, of the treble concupiscence.

But listen to a parable and you will see that the rich also can save themselves although they are rich, or they can make amends for their past wrongs, by making good use of their riches, even if they were unjustly obtained. Because God, the Most Good God, always grants many means to His children so that they may save themselves.

So there was a rich man who had a steward. Some enemies of the latter, who were envious of the good position he had, or because they were very friendly with the rich man and therefore mindful of his wealth, accused the steward saying to his master: “He squanders your wealth. He embezzles your goods. Or he does not make them yield any fruit. Be careful. Defend yourself!”

The rich man, after hearing such repeated accusations, summoned the steward. And he said to him: “I have been told so and so. Why have you done that? Give me an account of your stewardship, because I will not allow you to keep it any longer. I cannot trust you and I cannot make an example of injustice and servile tolerance, which would induce the other servants to act as you did. Go and come back tomorrow with your documents, that I may examine them and ascertain the situation of my property before handing it to another steward.” And he dismissed the steward, who went away and began to worry saying to himself: “And now? What shall I do now that the master is taking the stewardship from me? I have no savings, because, as I was sure that I would get away with it, I

spent in enjoyment everything I usurped. I do not feel like working as a peasant, subject to other people, because I am no longer used to digging, and I have grown heavier with orgies. And I dislike begging even more. It is too humiliating! But what shall I do?"

He thought it over and over again and he found a way out from his painful situation. He said: "I have found it! As I secured a pleasant life for myself so far, in the same way I will make sure that my friends will offer me hospitality out of gratitude, when I am dismissed from my office. He who does good always has friends. Let us go, therefore, and help people, in order to be helped, and let us go at once, before the news spreads and it is too late."

And he went to the sundry debtors of his master and he said to the first one: "How much do you owe my master for the money he lent you three years ago in springtime?"

And the debtor replied: "One hundred measures of oil for money and interest."

"Oh! Poor fellow! What, with such a large family and with your children afflicted by diseases, you have to give so much?! But did he not give you money to the value of thirty measures?!"

"Yes, but I needed it urgently and he said to me: 'I will give it to you, but on condition that you will pay me back whatever the sum will yield to you in three years.' It yielded the equivalent of one hundred measures. And I must give them."

"But that is usury! Don't! He is rich, while you are not far from starving. He has a small family, you have a large one. Write here that it yielded to the value of fifty measures and forget about it. I will swear that it is the truth. And you will benefit by it."

"But will you not betray me? And if he finds out?"

"Do you think it is possible? I am the steward and what I swear is sacred. Do as I tell you and do not worry."

The man signed the document, handed it to him and said: "May you be blessed! You are my friend and saviour. How can I compensate you?"

"In no way! But if I should get into trouble and be dismissed because of this, you will welcome me out of gratitude."

"Of course! Certainly! You may rely on that!"

The steward went to another debtor and talked to him more or less in the same way. This debtor was to give back one hundred measures of wheat, because the drought had destroyed his crops for three years, and he had to borrow what was necessary to feed his family.

"Forget about doubling what he gave you! How can one deny wheat and exact twice as much when a fellow and his family are starving and one's wheat is eaten by worms in the barns, because there is superabundance of it! Write eighty measures."

"But if he remembers that he gave me twenty, then another twenty, and then ten?"

"How can you expect him to remember? I gave them to you and I do not want to remember. Do as I say and it is all settled. There must be justice between rich and poor people! If I were the master, I would accept only the fifty measures, and perhaps I would remit them as well."

"You are good! I wish they were all like you! Remember that my house is open to you."

The steward called on other debtors, in the same way, stating that he was willing to get into trouble to put matters right according to justice. And offers of help and blessings rained upon him.

When he was reassured about his future, he went to his master, who, in turn, had dogged his steps and discovered his trick. The master, however, praised him saying: "What you did is not right and I do not praise you for that. But I must praise you for your cunning. The children of this world are really more cunning than the children of Light."

And I repeat to you what the rich man said: "Fraud is not right, and I will never praise anyone for it. But I exhort you to be shrewd, at least like the children of this world, with the means of this world, to make them serve as money to enter the Kingdom of Light." That is, make good use of earthly riches, which are means distributed unjustly and used to purchase a fleeting welfare, which is of no value in the eternal Kingdom, so that they may open its door to you. Assist the poor with the means you have, give back what you or any other member of your family took unjustly, break with the evil guilty love for riches. And all these things will be like friends who in the hour of your death will open the

eternal gates to you and will receive you in the blissful abode.

How can you expect God to give His heavenly goods, if He sees that you cannot make good use even of earthly goods? As an impossible supposition, do you want Him to accept squanderers in the heavenly Jerusalem? No, never. Up there one will live with charity, generosity and justice. Everybody for One and everyone for everybody. The Communion of Saints is an active and honest society, it is a holy society. And no one who has proved to be unjust and unfaithful can enter it.

Do not say: "But we shall be faithful up there, because we shall have everything up there without any fear." No. He who is unfaithful in little, would be unfaithful even if he possessed Everything, and he who is unjust in little is unjust in much. God does not trust true wealth to those who in the earthly test prove that they do not know how to use earthly riches. How can God entrust you one day in Heaven with the mission of supporting spirits of your brothers on the Earth, when you have shown that extortions, frauds and greed are your prerogatives? He will, therefore, deny you your treasure, which He had kept for you, and He will give it to those who were shrewd on the Earth, by using also what is unjust and unwholesome in deeds which make them just and wholesome.

No servant can serve two masters. Because he will belong to one or to the other, and he will hate one or the other. The two masters whom man can choose are God or Mammon. But if he wishes to belong to the former, he cannot wear the colours, or follow the voice, or use the means of the latter.»

A voice rises from the group of the Essenes: «Man is not free to choose. He is forced to follow a fate. We do not state that it is distributed unwisely. On the contrary the perfect Mind has fixed, according to its own perfect plan, the number of those who will be worthy of Heaven. All the others strive in vain to become so. That is the situation. And it cannot be otherwise. As one coming out of a house may be killed by a stone falling from a cornice, whereas one in the thick of the battle may not suffer the slightest wound, likewise he who wants to save himself, but it is not written so, will only commit sin even unawares, because his damnation is fated.»

«No, man. It is not so. And change your mind. By thinking so you do the Lord wrong.»

«Why? Tell me and I will change my mind.»

«Because, by saying so, you mentally confess that God is unjust with His creatures. He created them in the same way and with the same love. He is a Father. Perfect in His paternity, as He is in everything else. How can He, therefore, make distinctions and curse a man when he is being conceived and is an innocent embryo? When he is incapable of committing sin?»

«To take His revenge for the offence received from man.»

«No. God does not take His revenge thus! He would not be satisfied with a miserable sacrifice like that, with an unjust forced sacrifice. The offence made to God can be removed by the God made Man. He will be the Expiator. Neither this nor that man. Oh! I wish it had been possible for Me to have to remove only the original sin! I wish there had been no Cain on the Earth, no Lamech, no corrupt sodomite, no homicide, thief, fornicator, adulterer, blasphemer, no one without love for one's parents, no perjurer, and so forth! But of each of those sins, the sinner is guilty and the author, not God. God left His children free to choose between Good and Evil.»

«And that was wrong» shouts a scribe. «He tempted us beyond measure. Although He knew that we were weak, ignorant, poisoned, He led us into temptation. That is either imprudence or wickedness. Since You are just, You must grant that what I say is the truth.»

«You are telling lies to tempt Me. God had given Adam and Eve all the necessary advice, to what avail?»

«He did the wrong thing even then. He should not have put the tree, the temptation, in the Garden.»

«In that case, where is the merit of man?»

«He would have done without it. He would have lived with no merit of his own, but only with the merit of God.»

«They are tempting You, Master. Leave those serpents alone, and listen to us, who live in continence and meditation» shouts once again the Essene.

«Yes, you live. But badly. Why do you not live holily?»

The Essene does not reply to the questions, but he asks: «As You gave me a convincing answer on free will, and I will meditate on it with good will, hoping that I will be able to accept it, now tell me. Do You really believe in the resurrection of bodies and in the life of souls completed by it?»

«And do you want God to put an end to the life of man thus?»

«But the soul... Since the soul is happy with its reward, why make matter rise again? Will it increase the happiness of the blessed souls?»

«Nothing will increase the bliss of a saint when he possesses God. Or rather, one thing only will increase it on the Last Day: the knowledge that there is no longer sin. But do you not think that it is fair, that as during this day body and soul were united in the struggle to possess Heaven, they should be united also in the eternal Day to enjoy the reward? Are you not convinced? Why do you live in continence and meditation, then?»

«To be... a more perfect man, the lord over the other animals that obey their instinct without control and to be better than most men who are soiled with animality even if they display phylacteries, fringes, tassels and wide garments and they call themselves “the separated ones.”»

Anathema! The Pharisees, upon hearing the pungent remark, which is approved by the crowds with a murmur, become excited and shout like madmen. «He is insulting us, Master! You are aware of our holiness. Defend us» they shout gesticulating.

Jesus replies: «He, too, is aware of your hypocrisy. Garments have nothing to do with holiness. When you deserve to be praised, I will be able to speak. But My answer to you, Essene, is that you sacrifice yourself for too little. Why? For whom? For how long? For human praise. For a mortal body. For as short a time as the flight of a falcon. Raise your sacrifice. Believe in the true God, in the blissful resurrection, in the free will of man. Lead an ascetic life, but for those supernatural reasons. And with your risen body you will enjoy eternal happiness.»

«It is late! I am old! I have perhaps wasted my life in an erroneous sect... It's the end!...»

«No. It is never the end for those who want good! Listen, sinners, and you, who are in error, or you, whatever your past may have been. Repent. Come to Mercy. It opens its arms to you. I show you the way. I am the pure vital fountain. Get rid of what has misled you so far. Undress and come to the fountain. Clothe yourselves with light. Revive. Have you stolen like highwaymen, or like gentlemen and craftily in business or in offices? Come. Have you had bad habits or lustful passions? Come. Have you oppressed your neighbour? Come. Repent.

Come to love and to peace. Oh! Let the love of God flow upon you. Relieve that love, which is in anguish because of your resistance, your fear, your hesitation. I beg you in the name of My Father and yours. Come to Life and to the Truth, and you will have eternal life.»

A man shouts from the crowd: «I am rich and a sinner. What shall I do to come?»

«Give up everything for the sake of God and of your soul.»

The Pharisees grumble and scoff at Jesus, calling Him «vendor of illusions and heresies», and «sinner feigning holiness», and they warn Him that heretics are always heretics and that such are the Essenes. They say that sudden conversions are nothing but passing enthusiasm and that an impure man will always be impure, a thief will always be a thief and a murderer a murderer. They conclude by saying that, as they live in perfect holiness, they are the only ones entitled to Heaven and to preaching.

«This was a happy day. Seeds of holiness were falling into hearts. My love, nourished by the kiss of God, was giving life to the seed. The Son of man was happy in sanctifying... You have poisoned the day. But it does not matter. I say to you – and if I am not gentle, the fault is yours – I say to you that you are the ones who show themselves just, or try to do so, in the eyes of men, but you are not just. God knows your hearts. What is great in the eyes of men, is abominable before the immensity and perfection of God. You quote the old Law. Why, then, do you not live according to it? *You alter the Law in your favour*, aggravating it with burdens that give you a profit. Why, then, do you not allow Me to alter it to the benefit of these little ones, removing all the tassels and heavy useless burdens of the precepts made by you, which are so many and such that the essential Law disappears under them and is smothered? I feel sorry for these crowds, for these souls, who seek fresh air in Religion and find a slip-knot. They seek love and find terror... No. Come, little ones of Israel. *The Law is love! God is love!* This is what I say to those who are frightened among you. The severe Law and the threatening prophets who foretold Me, but notwithstanding the cries of their distressing prophecies they were not able to withhold sin, end with John. *After John comes the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of love.* I say to the humble: “Go in. It is for you.” And everyone with a good will strives to go in. *But for those who will not lower their heads, beat their chests and say: “I have sinned”, there will be no Kingdom.* It is written: “Circumcise your heart and be obstinate no longer.” This land saw the prodigy of Elisha, who made the foul

water wholesome, by throwing some salt into it. And do I not throw the salt of Wisdom into your hearts? Why are you then worse than water and you do not change your spirits? Mix My salt with your formulae and they will have a fresh taste, because they will give the Law its primitive strength. In you, first of all, as you are the most needy. Do you say that I change the Law? No. You tell lies. *I give the Law its original form, which you distorted.* Because it is the Law that will last as long as the Earth, and both sky and earth will disappear before one only of its elements or its advice. And if you alter it, because you like to do so, and if you draw fine distinctions looking for loop-holes for your faults, you had better know that it is of no avail. It is of no avail, Samuel! Of no avail, Isaiah. It is written: "You shall not commit adultery" and I complete it adding: "He who sends back his wife to marry another one, is adulterous, and he, who marries a woman repudiated by her husband, is adulterous, because what God joined, death only can separate." But harsh words are for obdurate sinners. Those who have sinned, but grieve desolately for doing so, must know and believe that God is Goodness, and let them come to Him Who absolves, forgives and admits to Life. Go with this certainty. Spread it in people's hearts. Preach mercy, which gives you peace, blessing you in the name of the Lord.»

The crowds disperse slowly, both because the path is narrow and because they are attracted by Jesus. But they disperse.

The apostles remain with Jesus and while speaking they make their way. They seek the shade walking close to a thicket of ruffled tamarisks. But there is an Essene in it. The one who spoke to Jesus. He is taking off his white clothes.

Peter, who is ahead of everybody, is dumbfounded seeing that the man is left with only his drawers on, and he runs back saying: «Master! A madman! The one who was speaking to You, the Essene. He is undressed and is weeping and sighing. We cannot go there.»

But the man, who is lean, bearded, with no clothes on his body except his drawers and sandals, is already coming out of the thicket and he turns his steps towards Jesus weeping and beating his chest. He prostrates himself: «I am the one whose heart has been miraculously cured. You have cured my soul. I will obey Your word. I want to clothe myself with light, leaving every other thought, which might clothe me with errors. I will live apart to meditate on the true God, to obtain life and resurrection. Is that enough? Give me a new name and tell me a place where I can live of You and of Your words.»

«He is mad! We could not lead such a life and we have heard so many of His words! And he... just after one sermon...» say the apostles to one another.

But the man, who has heard them, says: «Are you going to put limitations to God? He has broken my heart to give me a free spirit. Lord!...» he implores, stretching his arms out towards Jesus.

«Yes. Your name is Elijah and be fire. That mountain is full of caves. Go there, and when you hear the earth quake because of a dreadful earthquake, come out, and look for the servants of the Lord to join them. You will then be re-born and you will be a servant, too. Go!»

The man kisses His feet, gets up and goes away.

«But is he going nude like that?» ask the dumbfounded apostles.

«Give him a mantle, a knife, tinder and flint, and some bread. He will walk today and tomorrow and then he will retire to pray where we stopped and the Father will see to His son.»

Andrew and John run after him and they reach him when he is about to disappear round a bend.

They come back saying: «He took everything. We also told him where we were. What an unexpected prey, Lord!»

«God makes plants flower also on rocks. And in the deserts of hearts He makes spirits of good will rise to comfort Me. Now let us go towards Jericho. We will stop in some house in the country.»

381. In Nike's House.

12th February 1946.

Although the road runs through a green country, with leafy trees along its sides, it is as hot as an oven in the midday sun. Heat and the aroma of bread being baked in an oven come from the fields, where the crops are maturing rapidly. The light is dazzling. Each ear of corn looks like a tiny gilded lamp among the golden glumes and the pointed awns, and the sunshine sparkling on the straw of

the cornstalks is as troublesome to the eye as the dazzling road. In vain the pilgrims seek relief in the leaves. If they look up at them, they expose their eyes even more to the glare of the oppressive sunshine, and they must lower them at once, to shun such violence, and close them, leaving a narrow gap between their dusty reddened irritated eyelashes. Perspiration trickling down their dusty cheeks leaves shiny streaks on them. They drag their tired feet raising more dust, which increases their torture.

Jesus comforts His tired apostles. Although He is perspiring as well, He has covered His head with His mantle, to protect it from the sun, and advises the others to do likewise. They obey without speaking. They are too exhausted to waste their breath on one of their usual complaints. They are proceeding like drunk men...

«Cheer up. There is a house over there in the fields...» says Jesus.

«If it is like the others... there will be nothing but the distress of walking so much through fiery fields to no purpose» grumbles Peter within his mantle. The others confirm uttering a depressed «h'm!».

«I will go. You stay here in this little shade.»

«No. We will come with You. They will have at least a well, as there is no shortage of water here... and we will have a drink to quench the fire within us.»

«It will do you harm to drink while you are so hot.»

«We shall die... but it will be better than what we have now...»

Jesus does not reply. He sighs and He goes ahead of them along a path through fields of corn.

The fields do not stretch as far as the house, but they end at the border of a wonderful shady orchard, which forms a rich refreshing ring round the house, as both light and heat are mitigated in it. And the apostles thrust themselves into it, with an «ah!» of relief. But Jesus goes on, heedless of their entreaties to stop for a little while.

The cooing of doves, the creaking of pulleys and the calm voices of women are heard from the house and spread in the dead silence of the country.

Jesus arrives at a little esplanade, which surrounds the house like a wide clean pavement, over which a pergola of grapes spreads its entangled leafy branches

and a protecting shade. There are two wells, one on the left and one on the right hand side of the house, shaded by the vine. There are some flowerbeds against the walls of the house. Light dark-striped curtains are fluttering at the open doors. Voices of women and noise of dishes come from a room. Jesus goes towards it and as He passes by, a dozen doves, which were pecking cereals spread on the ground, take flight with loud flapping of wings. The noise draws the attention of those in the room and it is contemporaneous with the drawing of the curtain, which Jesus moves to the right with His hand, while a servant pulls it to the left and remains astonished before the Unknown visitor.

«Peace to this house! May I, as a pilgrim, have some refreshment?» asks Jesus standing on the threshold of the room, a large kitchen in which servants are washing the dishes used for the midday meal.

«The landlady will not reject You. I will go and tell her.»

«There are twelve more people with Me, and if I should get refreshment only for Myself, I would prefer to have none.»

«We will tell the mistress and she certainly...»

«Master and Lord! You here? In my house? What grace is this?» interrupts a voice, and a woman, Nike, rushes forward and kneels to kiss Jesus' feet.

The maidservants are left like statues. The one who was washing the dishes is standing with a towel in her right hand and a dripping dish in her left one, reddened by the boiling water. Another one, who was polishing knives, crouching in a corner, gets up on her knees to see better, and the knives fall on the floor with a crash. A third one, intent on removing ashes from the cookers, raises her face covered with ashes and remains thus, emerging open mouthed from the level of the fireplace.

«I am here. Many houses rejected us. We are tired and thirsty.»

«Oh! Come! Not here. Let us go into the rooms facing north, which are cool and shady. And you, prepare water so that they can wash, and bring some aromatic drinks. And you, girl, go and awake the steward and ask him to let you have some snacks, while waiting for the meal...»

«No, Nike! I am not a worldly guest. I am your persecuted Master. I ask for shelter and love, rather than for food. I ask for pity, more for My friends than for Myself...»

«Yes, Lord. But when did You have Your last meal?»

«They... I do not know. I, yesterday at dawn, with them.»

«So You can see... I will not commit excesses. But as a sister or a mother I will give everybody what is necessary, and as a servant and disciple, I will give You honour and assistance. Where are the brothers?»

«In the orchard. But I think that they are coming. I can hear their voices.»

Nike runs out, she sees them and calls them and then she leads them with Jesus into a cool entrance-hall, where there already are basins and towels, so that they can wash their faces, hands and feet and get rid of dust and perspiration.

«I beg you, take off your dusty clothes and give them to the servants at once. You will feel much better with clean clothes and cool sandals on. Then come into that hall. I will wait for you there.»

And Nike goes out closing the door...

... «Ah! It is lovely in this shade and so refreshing!» says Peter with a sigh entering the room where Nike is waiting for them kindly and respectfully.

«My joy in giving you relief is certainly greater than your relief, o apostle of my Lord.»

«H'm! Apostle... Of course... But, listen, Nike, let us do without ceremony. You: without attaching importance to the fact that you are rich and wise; I, without attaching importance to the fact that I am an apostle. So... like good brothers and sisters, who need each other's help for their souls and their bodies. The thought that I am an "apostle" frightens me too much.»

«What are you afraid of?» asks the amazed woman smiling.

«Of being... too big... with regard to the clay I am, and that I may collapse because of the weight... I am afraid of... becoming arrogant with pride... I am afraid that... the others, I mean the disciples and good souls, knowing that I am the apostle, may keep away from me and hold their tongues even if I make mistakes... And I do not want that because among the disciples, also among those who believe in a simple way, there are many who are better than I am, some with regard to this, some with regard to that, and I want to do as... as that bee over there, which has come in, and of the baskets of fruit that you ordered to be brought in for us, it sucked a little here and a little there, and now, to

complete the task, is sucking those flowers and then it will go out and suck clover and cornflowers, camomiles and bindweeds. It takes a little of everything. And I must do likewise...»

«But you suck the most beautiful flower! The Master.»

«Yes, Nike. But from Him I learn to become a son of God. Men will teach me to become a man.»

«You are.»

«No, woman. I am little less than an animal. And really I do not know how the Master puts up with me...»

«I put up with you because you know what you are, and I can work on you as easily as one can knead dough. But if you were stubborn and offered resistance, and above all if you were proud, I would drive you away as if you were a demon» says Jesus.

Some maidservants come in with cups of cold milk, and porous amphoras, which keep liquids very cool.

«Take some refreshment» says Nike. «Then you will be able to rest until evening. There are rooms and beds in the house. And if I did not have them, I would give you mine, to let you rest. Master, I will now withdraw to attend to household matters. You all know where to find me and the maidservants.»

«Go and do not worry about us.»

Nike goes out. The apostles do ample justice to the snack offered to them. And while eating with a good appetite, they speak and make comments.

«Lovely fruit!»

«And a good disciple.»

«Beautiful house. Not magnificent, not poor.»

«And it is controlled by a woman who is both kind and firm. There is order, neatness, respect, and tenderness at the same time.»

«There are beautiful fields round it! A fortune!»

«Yes. And a furnace!...» says Peter, who has not forgotten what he suffered. The others laugh.

«But it is very pleasant here. Did You know that Nike lived here?» asks Thomas.

«Not any more than you did. I knew that she had recently bought some property near Jericho. But that was all. The dear angel of pilgrims led us here.»

«Actually, he led You. We did not want to come.»

«I was ready to throw myself on the ground and let the sun burn me, rather than take another step» says Matthew.

«It is not possible to travel during the day. The sun is very strong this year. It seems to be going mad as well.»

«Yes, we will travel during the first hours in the morning and in the evening. But we shall soon be up on the mountains. It is milder there.»

«To my house?» asks the Iscariot.

«Yes, Judas. And to Juttah and to Hebron.»

«Not to Ashkelon, eh?»

«No, Peter. We will go where we have never been. We shall still have to suffer from sunshine and heat. A little sacrifice for My sake and for the sake of souls. Rest now. I am going into the orchard to pray.»

«But are You never tired? Would it not be better if You had a rest as well?» asks Judas of Alphaeus.

«Perhaps the Master wishes to stop here...» remarks the Zealot.

«No. We will leave at dawn to wade across the river in the cool hours.»

«Where are we going beyond the Jordan?»

«The crowds are going home after Passover. Too many looked in vain for Me in Jerusalem. I will preach and cure at the ford. Then we will go and tidy up Solomon's house. It will be invaluable to us...»

«But are we not going back to Galilee?»

«We will go there, too. But we will remain in these southern parts for a long time, and a shelter will be most useful to us. Sleep. I am going.»

Supper must be over. It is night. Dew drops fall from cornices and resound on the vine leaves. There is an unbelievable number of stars in the sky and eyes get lost contemplating them. Chirps of crickets and night birds. The silence of the country.

The apostles have already withdrawn. But Nike is up and she is listening to the Master. He is sat stiffly on a stone seat against the house. The woman is standing before Him, in an attitude of respectful attention.

Jesus must be concluding a speech already started. He says: «Yes. The remark is correct. But I was sure that the penitent, or rather the “reviving man” would not be left without the help of the Lord. While we were having supper and you were serving and asking questions, I was thinking that you are the help. You said: “I can only follow You for short periods of time, because I have to watch over the house and the new domestic staff.” And you regretted that and you said that if you had known you were going to find Me so soon, you would not have bought the property, which is now binding you. You can see that it has served to give hospitality to the evangelizers. So it is good. And it may be useful again... while waiting to serve your Lord perfectly. I now ask a service of you, for the sake of that soul, who is reviving and is full of good will, but is very weak. Excessive penance might distress him, and Satan might take advantage of such distress.»

«What must I do, my Lord?»

«Go to him. Go to him every month, as if it were a rite. It is a rite of brotherly love. You will go to the Cherith and climbing up the path among the bushes you will call: “Elijah! Elijah!”. He will look out in amazement and you will greet him thus: “Peace to you, brother, in the name of Jesus the Nazarene.” You will take him as many pieces of bread baked twice, as the days of a month. Nothing else in summer. From the Feast of the Tabernacles onwards, you will take him also four jars of oil each month, together with the bread. And at the Tabernacles take him a garment made of goatskin, a heavy one, water resistant, and a blanket. Nothing else.»

«And no word?»

«Only those strictly useful. He will ask after Me. Tell him what you know. He will confide his hesitations, his hopes and low spirits to you. You will tell him what your faith and piety inspire you. The sacrifice, in any case, will not last long... Not even twelve months... Will you be merciful to Me and to the penitent?»

«Yes, my Lord... But why are You so sad?»

«And why are you weeping?»

«Because in Your words I hear a foreboding of death... Will I be losing You so soon, Lord?» Nike weeps behind her veil.

«Do not weep! There will be so much peace for Me, afterwards... No more hatred. No more ambushes. No more all this... horror of sin against Me and around Me... No more atrocious contacts... Oh! Do not weep, Nike! Your Saviour will be in peace. He will be victorious...»

«But before... I always read the prophets with my husband And we shuddered with horror at the words of David and Isaiah. But will it really be like that for You?»

«That and more...»

«Oh!... Who will comfort You? Who will let You die still hopeful?»

«The love of My disciples and particularly of My women disciples.»

«Also mine, then. Because at no cost I will be far from my Saviour. Only... oh! Lord! Exact any kind of penance from me, any sacrifice, but give me manly courage for that hour. When you will be like “a dry potsherd”, “with Your tongue stuck to Your jaw” out of thirst, when You will look “like a leper who covers his face”, grant that I may recognise You as the King of kings and I may assist You, as a devoted servant. Do not conceal Your tortured face from me, o my God! But as You now allow me to delight in Your brightness, o Morning Star, let me look at You then and may Your face be impressed in my heart, because, oh! also my heart, like Yours, will melt like wax on that day, through grief... » Nike is now on her knees, almost prostrated and now and again she raises her weeping face to look at her Lord, Whose body is white in the white moonlight against the dark wall.

«You will have all that. And I shall have your pity. And it will come with Me to the scaffold and from there it will rise to Heaven. Your crown forever. Angels and men will utter the most beautiful praise of you: “In the hour of calamity, of sin, of doubt, she was faithful, she did not sin and she assisted her Lord.” Stand up, woman. And may you be blessed as from now and forever.»

He lays His hands on her head while she is getting up, and they then go into the silent house, for their night's rest.

382. At the Ford between Jericho and Bethabara.

14th February 1946.

The banks of the Jordan near the ford are exactly like a camp of nomads during these days, when caravans are returning to their home towns. Tents or just blankets, tied to two tree-trunks, or resting on branches planted in the ground, or tied to the high saddle of a camel, fixed, in short, somehow, to enable people to get under them, and be sheltered from the dew which must be just like rain in these places below sea level, are spread everywhere along the woods, which form a green frame round the river.

When Jesus arrives with His disciples near the river banks, to the north of the ford, the camps are slowly awaking. Jesus must have left Nike's house at dawn, because the sun has not yet risen and the place is beautiful, cool and serene. The more earnest people, awakened by the neighing, braying, the strange cries of horses, donkeys and camels, by the quarrels or songs of hundreds of sparrows and other birds among the branches of willows, of reed-thickets, of the tall trees forming green tunnels above the flowery banks, begin to steal out of the gaily-coloured tents and go down to the river to wash. One can hear some children weeping and the sweet voices of mothers speaking to their children.

All the signs of life revive minute by minute. All kinds of vendors arrive from the nearby town of Jericho, with new pilgrims, guards and soldiers responsible for watching over and keeping order during these days, when tribes of every region meet and do not spare themselves insults and reproaches, and when there are frequent thefts by highwaymen, who mix with the crowds disguised as pilgrims in order to steal; and there is no shortage of prostitutes, who have come on “their” Passover pilgrimage, that is, to squeeze money and gifts out of the more wealthy and lustful passengers in payment for an hour's pleasure, which miserably neutralises all Passover purifications... The honest women, who among the pilgrims have husbands and grown up sons, shout like upset magpies calling their men, who stand enraptured, or at least mothers and wives think so, watching the prostitutes. And the shameless women laugh and give sharp answers to the titles addressed to them by the honest women. The men, and the soldiers in particular, laugh and willingly joke with the prostitutes. Some

Israelites, morally rigid, or only hypocritically rigid, go away indignantly, whilst others... make use of the deaf-and-dumb alphabet in advance, because they make themselves clearly understood with the prostitutes by gestures.

Jesus does not follow the straight road that would take Him to the middle of the camp. He goes down to the gravel bed of the river, takes His sandals off and walks where the water washes against the grass. The apostles follow Him.

The elder ones, who are more uncompromising, grumble: «And to think that the Baptist preached penance here!»

«Yes! And this place is now worse than a porch in the Roman thermae!»

«And those who call themselves saints do not disdain to amuse themselves there!»

«Did you see them, too?»

«Of course I did! I have eyes as well!...»

The younger or less rigid apostles – such as Judas of Kerioth who laughs and watches very carefully what is happening in the camps and does not disdain contemplating the beautiful impudent women who have come looking for customers; and Thomas, who laughs watching the angry wives and the indignant Pharisees; and Matthew, who cannot speak severely against vices and corrupt people, as once he was a sinner himself, and is content with sighing and shaking his head; and James of Zebedee, who watches without interest and without criticising, indifferently – follow their little group, ahead of which there is Jesus with Andrew, John and James of Alphaeus.

Jesus' face is uncommunicative, as if it were carved in marble. And it becomes more and more uncommunicative, as from the top of the embankment He hears words of admiration or shameless conversations between a not very honest man and a prostitute. He looks straight ahead all the time, fixedly. He does not want to see. And His attitude makes His intention very clear.

But a young man, magnificently dressed, who is speaking to two prostitutes with other fellows like him, says in a loud voice to one of the women: «Go! We want to have a good laugh. Go and offer yourself! Comfort Him! He is sad because, poor as He is, he cannot buy women.»

Jesus' ivory face blushes and then becomes pale once again. But He does not look round. His blushing is the only sign that He has heard.

The impudent woman, with her necklaces tinkling loudly and her dress flapping lightly, utters an affected cry and jumps from the low embankment on to the gravel bed, and in doing so, she succeeds in showing much of her secret beauty. She falls just at Jesus' feet and with trilling laughter on her beautiful lips, inviting eyes and figure, she shouts: «Oh! handsome one among those born of woman! For a kiss of Your lips, I give all myself without payment!»

John, Andrew and James of Alphaeus are paralysed with scandalised astonishment and cannot make a gesture. But Peter! He springs like a panther and from his group he falls heavily on the unfortunate woman, now on her knees and leaning backwards, he shakes her, lifts her, hurls her, with an awful epithet, against the embankment, then charges her to give her the rest.

Jesus says: «Simon!» A cry which is more than a sermon.

And Simon goes back to his Lord, red with anger. «Why do You not let me punish her?»

«Simon, you do not punish a garment which has become dirty. You wash it. Her garment is her filthy body and her soul is polluted. Let us pray to cleanse her soul and her body.» He says so kindly, in a low voice, but loud enough to be heard by the woman, and setting out again, He now does cast a glance with His mild eyes at the wretched woman for one moment. One glance only! For one moment only! But all the power of His merciful love is in it! And the woman lowers her head, picks up her veil and covers herself with it... Jesus continues on His way.

He is now at the ford. The shallow water allows adults to cross to the other side on foot. It is enough to lift one's clothes above one's knees and look for the large white stones submerged in the crystal-clear water forming a kind of pavement for the people wading across. Those on horseback cross over downstream.

The apostles wallow happily in the water half way up their thighs and Peter cannot believe that it is true. And he promises the others and himself a refreshing bath when they stop in Solomon's house, as compensation for yesterday's roasting.

They are now on the other side. Here also the crowds are becoming active after the night's rest, or people are drying themselves after wading.

Jesus orders: «Spread around and inform people that the Rabbi is here. I am going near that fallen tree-trunk and I will wait for you there.»

Many people are soon informed and they flock to hear Him.

Jesus begins to speak. A sad procession passes by following a litter, on which there is a young man who has been taken ill in Jerusalem, and as the doctors have condemned him, he is now being rushed home to die there. Everybody is speaking about him because he is rich and still young. And many say: «It must be very sad to die when one is so wealthy and so young!» And some say perhaps they are people who already believe in Jesus: «It serves him right! He will not believe. The disciples went to his relatives and said to them: “The Saviour is here. If you have faith and you ask Him, He will cure him.” But he was the first to refuse to come to the Rabbi.» Criticism follows pity. And Jesus refers to that to begin His speech.

«Peace to everybody!

Rich and young people certainly do not like to die, when they are rich only in money and young in age. *But those, who are rich in virtue and young because of their pure habits, are not sorry to die.* A truly wise person, from the age of discretion onwards, *acts in such a way as to die peacefully.* Life is preparation for death, just as death is preparation for a greater Life. The true wise man, when he understands the truth of living and dying, the truth of dying to rise again, *strives in every possible way to divest himself of what is useless, and to become enriched with what is useful,* that is, with virtues and good deeds, in order to have a supply of goods before Him Who summons him to judge him, to reward or punish him with perfect justice. The true wise man leads a life that makes him more adult in wisdom than an old man, and younger than a teenager, because *by living virtuously and justly, he keeps such pure feelings in his heart* that even youths at time do not possess. How sweet then it is to die! The wise man reclines his tired head on the bosom of the Father, he relaxes in His embrace, and in the midst of the mist of fleeing life he says: “I love You, I hope in You, I believe in You”, saying so for the last time on the Earth, to repeat then the jubilant “I love You!”, forever and ever in the brightness of Paradise.

Is death a harsh thought? No. A just decree for all mortals, it is a grievous worry for those who do not believe and are full of sins. In vain man says, to explain the troubled anxiety of a man who is dying and who was not good during his lifetime: “It's because he would not like to die as yet, because he has not done any good, or only very little, and he would like to live to make amends.” In vain he says: “If he had lived longer, he could have had a greater reward, because he would have done more good.” A soul knows, at least vaguely, how much time it

has been given. *No time, as compared to eternity.* And the soul spurs the whole ego to act. But, poor soul! How often it is overwhelmed, trodden upon, gagged, in order not to hear its words! That happens to those who lack good will. Whilst just men, from their very childhood, listen to their souls, obey their advice, and are continuously active; and saints die young in age but rich in merits, at times at the dawn of life; and not even by the addition of one hundred or one thousand years, would they become holier than they are, because the love for God and their neighbour, practised in every form and with utter generosity, makes them perfect. *What matters in Heaven is not how long, but how one has lived.*

People mourn for corpses and weep over them. But corpses do not weep. People tremble at the thought that they must die. But they do not worry about living in such a way as not to tremble at the hour of their death. Why do people not mourn for and weep over living corpses, the real corpses, those who have in their bodies, as in graves, *dead souls*? And those who weep thinking that their bodies must die, why do they not weep over the corpses they have within themselves? How many corpses I see, and they laugh and joke, but they do not weep over themselves! How many fathers, mothers, husbands, wives, brothers, sons, friends, priests, teachers, I see who foolishly weep for a son, a wife, a husband, a brother, a parent, a friend, a believer, a disciple who died in clear friendship with God, after a life that was a crown of perfection and who do not weep over the corpses of the souls of a son, a husband, a wife, a brother, a father, a friend, a believer, a disciple, who is dead through vices and sins, and is dead and lost forever, unless he repents! Why not try to revive them? That is love, you know? It is the greatest love. Oh! foolish tears for dust, which has become dust! *Idolatry of affections! Hypocrisy of affection! Weep, but over the dead souls of your dearest relatives. Try to bring them to Life.* And I speak in particular to you, women, who can influence so much those whom you love.

Let us now consider together what Wisdom indicates as the cause of death and shame.

Do not insult God by misusing the life He gave you, soiling it with evil deeds which dishonour man.

Do not insult your parents through behaviour that flings mud at their white hair and causes violent sorrow to their last days.

Do not abuse those who assist you, so that you will not be cursed for the love you tread upon.

Do not abuse those who govern you, because it is not by rebelling against rulers that countries become great and free, but it is through the holy life of citizens that you obtain the assistance of the Lord, Who can touch the hearts of rulers or remove them from their places or even from life, as our history of Israel has shown several times, when they pass all bounds and especially when the people, sanctifying themselves, deserve the forgiveness of God, Who thus removes the oppressive yoke from the necks of the punished citizens.

Do not abuse your wives by putting an affront of adulterous love upon them, and do not abuse the innocence of your children with the knowledge of unlawful love.

Live holily in the eyes of those who, both because of their love and of their duty, consider you the person who is to be the example of their lives. You cannot sever your holiness in respect of your closest neighbour from your holiness towards God, because one germinates the other, as the two loves: of God and neighbour germinate each other.

Be just with your friends. Friendship is a kinship of the soul. It is written: "How delightful it is for friends to proceed all together." But it is delightful if they proceed on the path of virtue. Woe to those who pollute and betray friendship by turning it into selfishness, treason, vice or injustice. Too many are those who say: "I love you" to find out their friends' business and exploit the information to their own benefit! Too many are those who usurp the rights of their friends!

Be honest with judges. With all judges. From the most high judge, Who is God and cannot be defrauded or deceived through hypocritical practices, to the intimate judge, that is, your conscience, to the loving, suffering judges, watchful of their love, which are the eyes of your relatives, to the severe judges of the people. Do not lie invoking God to corroborate your lies.

Be honest in selling and buying. When you are selling, and your greed says to you: "Steal to have a bigger profit", whilst your conscience says to you: "Be honest because you would be sorry if you were robbed", listen to the latter voice, remembering that we must not do to others what we would not like done to ourselves. The money given to you in exchange for goods is often wet with the perspiration and tears of the poor. It costs hard work. You do not know how much grief it costs, how much sorrow and pain there is behind that money, which you vendors think that it is always too little for what you give. Sick people, fatherless children, old people short of money... Oh! holy grief and holy

dignity of the poor, which the rich do not understand, why are you not taken into consideration? Why are people honest when selling to the powerful and mighty ones, for fear of retaliation, whereas they take advantage of defenceless unknown brothers? That is rather a crime against love than against honesty itself. And God curses it, because the tears squeezed out of poor people, who have but tears as a reaction against abuse of power, cry to the Lord with the same voice as the blood drained from the veins of a man by a murderer, by a Cain of his fellow creature.

Be honest in your looks, as you are in your words and deeds. A look, given to those who do not deserve it, or denied to those who do deserve it, is like a noose and a dagger. The look that meets the impudent eyes of a prostitute, and says to her: "You are beautiful!", and replies to her inviting look with assent, is worse than the slip knot for a hanged man. The look denied to a poor relative or to a friend fallen into poverty, is like a dagger that pierces the hearts of those unhappy people. And likewise the glance of hatred or of contempt cast at one's enemy or at a beggar. Enemies are to be forgiven and loved at least with your souls, if your bodies refuse to love them. Forgiveness is love of the spirit. Not to take revenge is love of the spirit. A beggar is to be loved because nobody comforts him. It is not sufficient to throw a mite and pass by scornfully. The offering serves for the starving, naked, homeless body. But the pity that smiles in offering, that takes an interest in the tears of the unhappy fellow, is bread for his heart. Love, love, love.

Be honest in tithes and customary practices, be honest in your homes, without exploiting servants beyond measure and without tempting the maidservant sleeping under your roof. Even if the world is unaware of the theft committed in the secrecy of your house against your unaware wife and against the maidservant you debauch, God is aware of your sin.

Be honest in speaking. Be honest in bringing up your sons and daughters. It is written: "Keep a sharp look-out, that your daughter does not make you the laughing stock of the town." I say: "Keep a sharp look-out that the soul of your daughter may not die."

And now go. I also will go away, after giving you provisions of wisdom. May the Lord be with those who strive to love Him.»

He blesses them with a gesture, He descends quickly from the fallen tree and takes a lane among the trees going upstream and soon disappears among the green vegetation.

The crowds make comments animatedly with opposing opinions. The unfavourable comments, of course, are made by the few scribes and Pharisees who are among the crowds of humble people.

383. In Solomon's House. Old Ananias.

15th February 1946.

Solomon's little house, which I saw in the vision of the resurrection of Lazarus in 1944, without knowing its owner, is one of the last houses in the only road that takes one to the river, in this poor out-of-the-way village: one little village of boatmen, where the houses of the... "wealthier" people are situated along the little dusty road, and the others are spread at random among the trees of the embankments. They are not many. I do not think that they are fifty in all. And they are so small, that they could be all contained in one of those tenement houses in large modern towns. Springtime now makes them appear less miserable, because it adorns them with its freshness, while garlands of bindweed or festoons of vines, or cheery smiling yellow flowers of vegetable marrows adorn the coarse fences marking the boundaries of properties, the borders of roofs, the doors of houses. There is also an odd rose, which seems out of place in its beauty in the midst of baskets and nets, of yellow mustards in bloom and of the early pods of humble swinging beans.

Also the road looks prettier, because the cane-brake at its end, has not only the hard berries of the dusty knots, but it is also decorated with plumes, and wild gladioli display their sword-shaped leaves and bright-coloured flower spikes, while light bindweeds with threadlike stems embrace canes and knots winding round them and at each twirl they put forth the very delicate chalice of their little lilac-pink flower. And myriads of birds make love among the reed-thickets, flirting on the canes, swinging on the bearbines, enlivening the green marshy embankments with their chirping and many-coloured feathers.

Jesus pushes the little rustic gate admitting to a small kitchen garden or

courtyard. If it was a kitchen garden, now it is certainly a wild entanglement of grass, if it was a courtyard it is still a disorder of weeds sown by the wind. Only some vegetable marrows have been wise by clinging to the only vine and fig-tree, climbing up to put forth the smiling mouths of their flowers close to the miniature bunches of grapes of the vine, or to the tiny tender fig leaves, which at their joints, in the cradles of the stalks, have the hard gems of the fig-flowers just formed. Stinging-nettles are tormenting the apostles' bare feet, so much so that Peter and Thomas pick up two worm-eaten oars and are busy beating the irritating plants to lessen their poisonous effect.

In the meantime James and John are trying to turn the big rusty lock, and when they succeed, they open the rustic door, entering a kitchen room smelling mouldy and close. Dust and cobwebs decorate the walls. A rough table, some benches and seats and a shelf furnish it; there are two doors in one of the walls.

Peter explores... «There is a little room with one bed only. It's good for Jesus... And there? Ah! I see! This is the store-room, the lumber-room, the barn and the rats' nest... Look how they run! They have gnawed away everything these months. But now I will see to you, don't you worry. Master... can we act as if we were at home here?»

«That is what Solomon said.»

«Very well! Listen, brother, and you, James. Come here and close all these holes. And you, Matthew stand here at the door with Judas, and make sure that not even one mouse gets out. Just imagine that you are still the kind toll-collector at Capernaum. No customer escaped you then, not even if he became as thin as a lizard after hibernating... And you go and get as much weed as you can in the kitchen garden and bring it here. And You, Master, go... wherever You like, while I will fix these filthy devils, which have ruined these good nets and have eaten the whole keel of a boat...» And while speaking he gathers together gnawed bits of wood, bits of nets reduced like tow, faggots... everything in the middle of the room, and when he gets the green grass, he places it on top of the rest and then sets fire to the lot and runs out when the first spirals of smoke rise from the pile. And he laughs saying: «Let all the Philistines die!»

«But you are not going to set everything on fire?» asks Simon Zealot.

«No, my dear. Because the damp green grass chokes the flames, and the flames exhale smoke from the grass and thus, as good allies, the dry and green elements

help each other in taking revenge. Can you smell how it stinks? And before long you will hear screams! Who told me that swans sing before dying? Ah! Syntyche did! The mice will be singing, too, shortly.»

Judas Iscariot suddenly stops laughing and remarks: «We have not been able to find out anything about her. And we have heard nothing of John of Endor. I wonder where they have ended up.»

«In the right place certainly» replies Peter.

«Do you know where?»

«I know that they are no longer here to be harassed by ill-will.»

«Have you ever inquired about them? I have.»

«I have not. I am not interested in knowing where they are. I am quite satisfied thinking and praying that they may persevere in holiness.»

Thomas says: «Some rich Pharisees asked me about them. They are customers of my father. I replied that I do not know.»

«And are you not anxious to know?»

«I am not and that is the truth...»

«Listen! Listen! The smoke is having effect. But let us go out, otherwise we shall be choking, too» says Peter. And the distraction puts an end to the discussion.

Jesus is in the kitchen garden and is straightening the stems of legumes, creeping on the ground, which have come up from seed fallen there.

«Are You working as a kitchen gardener?» asks Philip smiling.

«Yes. It upsets Me to see a plant creep uselessly, whereas it is destined to rise towards the sun and bear fruit.»

«A beautiful subject-matter for a sermon, Master» remarks Bartholomew. «Yes. Beautiful. But everything can be used as a subject, when one knows how to meditate.»

«We will help You, too. Come on! Who will go down to the river to get some canes for the legumes?»

The younger disciples go away laughing, and the elder ones get busy weeding

carefully.

«Oh! One can see that it is a kitchen garden like that. There is no salad. But there are leeks, garlic, vegetables, fine herbs and legumes. And vegetable marrows! How many of them! The vine needs pruning and the fig-tree wants to be cleared...»

«But, Simon, we are not staying here!...» says Matthew.

«But we shall come here often. He said so. And it will do us no harm to have a little order here. Look! There is also a jasmine, poor thing, under this cascade of marrows. If Porphirea saw this plant so dejected, she would weep over it, and she would talk to it as to a child. Of course, before she had Marjiam she used to talk to her flowers as if they were her children... Here you are! I have made room here. I removed the marrow because... Oh! Here are the boys with the canes and a... Master, there is work for You. He is blind!»

In fact James, John, Andrew and Thomas come in, laden with canes, and Thomas is almost carrying a poor old man, covered with rags; his eyes are white with cataracts.

«Master, he was trying to find chicory on the banks and almost fell into the water. He has been left alone for some months, because the son who kept him died, and his daughter-in-law went back to her house and he... lives as best he can. Is that right, father?»

«Yes, it is. Where is the Lord?» he says turning round his veiled eyes. «He is here. Can you see that long whiteness? It's Him.»

But Jesus comes forward and takes him by the hand. «Are you alone, poor father? And you cannot see?»

«No, I cannot. When I could, I made baskets and eel-pots and I made also nets. But now... I can see more with my fingers than with my eyes, and looking for herbs, I make mistakes, and at times I have suffered from stomach disorder because of harmful herbs.»

«But in the village...»

«Oh! They are all poor and with many children, and I am old... If a donkey dies... one is sorry. But if an old man dies!... What is an old man? What am I? My daughter-in-law took everything away. If she had only taken me with her, like an old sheep, that I might be near my grandchildren... my son's children...»

he weeps resting his head on the chest of Jesus, Who holds him in His arms caressing him.

«Have you got a house?»

«She sold it.»

«And how do you live?»

«Like an animal. At first the people in the village helped me, Then they became tired...»

«Solomon in that case is no longer of the same race, because he is generous» remarks Matthew.

«With us, though. Why did he not give the house to the old man?» asks Philip.

«Because the last time he came here, I had a house. Solomon is good. But for some time the people of the village have said that he is mad, and they no longer do what Solomon had taught them» says the old man.

«Would you be willing to stay with Me?»

«Oh! I would no longer regret my grandchildren!»

«Even if you were to remain poor and blind, would you be happy just by serving Me?»

«Yes!» A trembling yes, and yet so firm...

«All right, father. Listen. You cannot travel about as I do. And I cannot remain here. But we can love each other and do each other a good turn.»

«You can, yes, to me. But I... What can old Ananias do?»

«You can take care of the house and of the kitchen garden so that I may find them in good order when I come back? Do you like the idea?»

«Yes, I do! But I am blind... The house I will become accustomed to the walls. But the kitchen garden How can I take care of it, if I cannot tell one herb from another? Oh! How lovely it would be to serve You thus, Lord! And end my life thus...» The old man is pressing his hands against his heart, dreaming of what is impossible.

Jesus bends smiling and kisses his dimmed eyes...

«But I... I am beginning to see... I can see... Oh! Oh!...» He staggers in his joy and would fall if Jesus did not support him.

«Eh! what joy does!...» says Peter in a deeply moved voice.

«And hunger... He says that he has been living for days on chicory, without any oil or salt...» concludes Thomas.

«Yes, that is why we brought him here. To feed him...»

«Poor old soul!» they all exclaim sympathetically.

The old man recovers his senses and weeps. The poor tears of old people so sad also when they are tears of joy, and he whispers: «Now... now I can serve You, Blessed One!» and he wants to bend to kiss Jesus' feet.

«No, father. Now we shall go inside and we shall have something to eat. Then we will give you a tunic and you will be among sons, and we shall have a father who will welcome us every time we come back and will bless us every time we depart. We will go and find two doves, so that you may always have living creatures around you. We will get seed for the kitchen garden and you will sow them in the soil and you will sow faith in Me in the hearts of the people here.»

«I will teach them charity, for they have none!»

«Yes, also charity. But be kind...»

«Oh! I will be. I did not say one harsh word to my daughter-in-law when she left me. I understood and I forgave.»

«I read that in your heart. That is why I loved you. Come. Come with Me...» And Jesus goes into the house holding the old man by the hand.

Peter looks at them, and with the back of his hand he wipes off a tear, before resuming his work.

«Are you weeping, brother?» Peter does not reply. Andrew insists: «Why are you weeping, brother?»

«Mind your own business, the weeds in this case. If I am weeping it's because... it's because I know why...»

«Tell us, too, be good» say several apostles.

«It's because, these lessons... given so... they touch my heart more than when He thunders imposingly...»

«But we see the King in Him then!» exclaims Judas.

«And here we see the Saint. Peter is right» says Bartholomew.

«But He must be powerful in order to reign.»

«And He must be holy in order to redeem.»

«I agree, with regard to souls. But with regard to Israel...»

«Israel will never be Israel unless souls become holy.»

The conflicting opinions bounce backwards and forwards.

The old man comes out with a water-jug in his hand. He is going to the fountain. He is so happy that he is entirely different from the man he was previously.

«Old father, listen. According to you, what does Israel need to become great?» Andrew asks him. «A king or a saint?»

«It needs God. That God Who is praying and meditating in there. Ah! My sons! Be good, you who follow Him! Be good, very good! Ah! what a gift the Lord has given you! What a gift!» and he goes away raising his arms towards the sky whispering: «What a gift! What a gift!»...

384. At the Cross-Road near Solomon's Village. Parable of the Labour Agents.

16th February 1946.

The little group comes out of the house; there is also the old man who admires himself in the tunic of one of the rather short apostles.

«If you wish to remain here, father...» says Jesus.

But the old man interrupts Him: «No, I will come, too. Oh! let me come. I had a meal yesterday! Last night I slept, and in a bed! And my heart is no longer grieved! I feel as strong as a youth...»

«Come, then. You will stay with Me, with Bartholomew and My brother Judas. The rest will go around in twos as I said. We shall all be here again by the sixth hour. Go! and peace be with you.»

They part, some go towards the river, some towards the country. Jesus lets them go away and He then sets out last. He crosses the village slowly and He is looked at by the fishermen coming back from the river or going there and by the industrious housewives, who have got up at dawn to do the washing, or water their kitchen gardens or bake bread. But none of them speak.

Only a boy, who is leading seven sheep to the river, asks the old man: «Where are you going, Ananias? Are you leaving the village?»

«I am going with the Rabbi. But I will come back with Him. I am His servant.»

«No. You are My father. Every just old man is a father and a blessing for the place giving him hospitality and for those who assist him. Blessed are those who love and respect the old» says Jesus with solemn countenance.

The boy looks at Him and seems to be frightened. He then whispers: «I always gave some of my bread to Ananias...» as if he wished to say: «Do not reproach me, for I do not deserve it.»

«Yes. Michael was good to me. He was a friend of my grand children... and he is still a friend of their grandfather. His mother is also good and she would help. But she has eleven children and they make their living by fishing...»

Some women approach them out of curiosity and listen.

«God will always help those who do what they can for the poor. And there is always a way to help them. Very often it is a lie to say: "I cannot." Because if one is willing, one will always find a superfluous mouthful, an old blanket, a garment that is no longer worn, and give it to someone who has none. And Heaven rewards for the gift. God will give you back, Michael, the mouthfuls you gave the old man.» Jesus caresses the boy and walks away.

The women remain mortified where they were, they ask the boy questions and he tells them what he knows. And the stingy women are seized with fear, as they had closed their hearts to the needs of the old man...

In the meantime Jesus has arrived at the last house and, He turns His steps towards a cross-road, which from the main road leads towards the little village. From there they can see caravans on the main road going back to the towns of

the Decapolis and Perea.

«Let us go over there and preach. Do you want to preach, too, father?»

«I am not capable. What can I say?»

«You are capable. Your soul is aware of the wisdom in forgiving and being faithful to God and resigned also in the hours of grief. And you know that God assists those who hope in Him. Go and tell the pilgrims.»

«Oh! I can do that!»

«Judas, go with him. I will remain here at the cross-road with Bartholomew.»

And when He is there He stops in the shade of a group of leafy plane-trees and waits patiently.

The nearby fields have beautiful crops and orchards. They look fresh in the early morning and it is a pleasure to admire them. And the caravans pass along the road... Only few people look at the two leaning against the trunks of the plane-trees. Perhaps they think that they are tired travellers. But some recognise Jesus and point Him out or they bow greeting Him.

At last there is one who stops his little donkey and those of his relatives, dismounts and goes towards Jesus saying: «God be with You, Rabbi! I come from Arbela. I heard You in autumn. This is my wife, this is her sister, a widow, and this is my mother. This elderly man is her brother. And that young man is my wife's brother. And these are our children. Give us Your blessing, Master. I heard that You spoke at the ford. But I arrived there last night... Will you not say a word to us?»

«The Word never refuses. But wait a few minutes, because other people are arriving...»

In fact the people of the village are arriving at the cross-road and they look very dejected. Other people, who had passed by along the main road, going north, come back, while others stop out of curiosity dismounting from their horses or remaining on horseback. The little group of listeners is increasing more and more.

Judas of Alphaeus also comes back with the old man; there are also two sick people with them and many more healthy ones.

Jesus begins to speak.

«Those who go along the roads of the Lord, the roads indicated by the Lord, and they do so with good will, end up by finding the Lord. You have found the Lord coming here after fulfilling your duty of faithful Israelites at holy Passover. And here is Wisdom speaking to you, as you wished, at this cross-road, where Divine Providence has made us meet. Man comes to many cross-roads on the way of his life. More supernatural cross-roads than material ones. Every day our conscience has to face the road-forks and cross-roads of Good and Evil. And one must choose carefully to avoid making mistakes. And if one does make a mistake, one must come back humbly, when one is called and warned. And even if the way of Evil, or also the way of tepidness, looks more beautiful, one must choose the rough but safe road of Good.

Listen to a parable.

A group of pilgrims, who had come from remote regions looking for work, arrived at the frontier of a nation. At the frontier there were agents sent by various masters to employ labour. Some were looking for men for mines, some for woods and forests, some for servants for a wicked rich man, and some for soldiers for a king who lived in a castle on the top of a mountain, which could be reached by a very steep road. The king needed soldiers, but he wanted them to be not so much men of violence as of wisdom, to send them to his various towns to sanctify his subjects. That is why he lived up there, in a kind of hermitage, to perfect his servants, preventing them from being corrupted by worldly distractions, which delay or annul the perfecting of their spirits. He did not promise high wages, or a comfortable life. But he assured them that they would obtain holiness and a reward at his service. That is what his agents said to those who arrived at the frontier. The agents of the owners of mines and fields instead said: “It will not be a comfortable life, but you will be free and you will earn enough to enjoy yourselves.” And those who were looking for servants for a wicked master promised rich meals, an idle life, enjoyment, wealth: “All you need do is to give consent to his exacting whims – oh! not at all painful! – and you will be able to enjoy yourselves like satraps.”

The pilgrims consulted with one another. They did not want to part... They asked: “The fields and mines, the palace of the wealthy man and that of the king, are they close to one another?”

“Oh! no!” replied the agents. “Come to that cross-roads and we will show you the different roads.” They went.

“Now! This wonderful, shady, flowery, smooth road, with cool fountains, leads to the palace of the wealthy man” said the agents looking for servants.

“Now! This dusty one, through pleasant fields, leads to the fields. It is exposed to the sun, but you can see that it is beautiful, after all” said those of the fields.

“Now! This one furrowed by heavy wheels and stained with dark spots, takes to the mines. It is neither beautiful nor ugly” said those of the mines.

“Now! This steep path, cut in the rocks inflamed by the sun, spread with thorn-bushes and ravines, which delay people, but are excellent defence against attacks of enemies, leads eastwards, to the severe, we could almost say sacred castle, where spirits are perfected in Good” said those of the king.

And the pilgrims looked and looked. They reckoned... They were tempted by many things, of which one only was entirely good. And they slowly parted. They were ten. Three went towards the fields... and two towards the mines. The remainders looked at one another and two of them said: “Come with us, to the king. We shall not make a profit and we shall not enjoy ourselves on the Earth, but we shall be saints forever.”

“That path there? Do you think we are mad? No profit? No enjoyment? It was not worth leaving everything and coming into exile to have even less than what we had in our country. We want to earn much and enjoy ourselves...”

“But you will lose the eternal Good! Have you not heard that he is a wicked person?”

“Nonsense! After a little while we will leave him, but we shall have had a good time and we shall be rich.”

“You will never get rid of him. The first were wrong in complying with their greed for money. But you! You are led by your greed for pleasure. Oh! Do not exchange your eternal destiny for a fleeting hour!”

“You are fools and you believe in idealistic promises. We are after facts. Goodbye!... “ and they began to run along the beautiful, shady, flowery, smooth road, rich in water, at the end of which the magic palace of the wicked epicurean was shining in the sunshine.

The two remainders took the steep path weeping and praying. And they almost lost heart after a few metres, as it was so hard. But they persevered. And their bodies seemed to become lighter and lighter the more they proceeded and their

fatigue was comforted by a strange rejoicing. They were panting and scratched all over when they arrived at the top of the mountain and were admitted to the presence of the king, who told them what he expected from them in order to make them his brave men, and he concluded saying: “Think about it for eight days and then let me know.”

And they thought it over and struggled fiercely with the Tempter, who wanted to frighten them with their bodies which said: “You are sacrificing us”, with the world, the remembrance of which was still alluring. But they won. They remained. They became heroes of Good. Death came, that is their glorification. From the height of Heaven they saw in the abyss those who had gone to the wicked master. They were in chains also after their lifetime and were groaning in the darkness of Hell. “And they wanted to be free and enjoy themselves!” said the two saints.

And the three damned souls saw them and cursed them and everybody, God first of all, in a horrid manner, saying: “You have all deceived us!”

“No. You cannot say that. You were warned of the danger, You wanted your own ruin” replied the blessed souls, who were serene even when seeing and hearing their obscene mockery and curses cast at them.

And they saw those of the fields and of the mines in various regions of Purgatory, and those saw them and said: “We were neither good nor bad, and we are now expiating our tepidity. Pray for us!”

“Oh! We will! But why did you not come with us?”

“Because we were not demons, but men... We lacked generosity. We loved what is temporary, even if honest, more than what is Eternal and Holy. We are now learning to know and love with justice.”

That is the end of the parable. Every man is at a cross-roads. At a perpetual cross-roads. Blessed are those who are firm and generous in following the ways of Good. May God be with them. And may God touch and convert those who are not so and lead them to become so. Go in peace.»

«And what about the sick people?»

«What is the matter with that woman?»

«Malign fever, which distorts her bones. She has gone as far as the Great Sea. But without any relief.»

Jesus bends over the sick woman and asks her: «Who do you think that I am?»

«He Whom I have been looking for. The Messiah of God. Have mercy on me, for I have looked for You so much!»

«May your faith give health both to your limbs and to your heart. And what about you, man?»

The man does not reply. The woman who accompanies him, replies on his behalf: «A tumor is eating his tongue. He cannot speak and he is dying of hunger.» The man in fact is a skeleton.

«Have you faith that I can cure you?» The man nods assent.

«Open your mouth» orders Jesus. And with His face close to the horrible mouth eaten away by the tumor, He breathes into it saying: «I want it!»

After a moment two cries are heard: «My bones are sound again»; «Mary, I am cured! Look! Look at my mouth. Hosanna! Hosanna!» and he wants to stand up, but he staggers through weakness.

«Give him something to eat» orders Jesus. And He is about to withdraw.

«Don't go away! Other sick people will be coming! Others are coming back... Cure them, too!» shout the crowds.

«Every morning I will be here from dawn until the sixth hour. Volunteers should gather the pilgrims together.»

«I will, Lord!» several people say. «May God bless you for that.»

And Jesus turns towards the village with His first companions and with the other disciples who have come, few at a time while He was speaking, and who have brought other people with them.

«But where are Peter and Judas of Kerioth?» asks Jesus.

«They have gone to the nearby town. They have a lot of money. They have gone shopping...»

«Yes. Judas worked a miracle and he is jubilant» remarks Simon Zealot smiling.

«Also Andrew, and he got a sheep, as a souvenir. He cured the broken leg of a shepherd, who rewarded him thus. We will give it to the old father. Milk is good for old people...» says John, caressing the old man who is happy.

They go into the house and prepare some food...

They are about to sit at the table, when the two missing apostles arrive, laden like donkeys and followed by a cart with a load of those mats used as beds by poor people in Palestine.

«Forgive me, Master. But this was needed. We are all right now» says Peter.

And Judas: «Look. We bought the bare necessities, clean and poor. As You like things» and they are busy unloading, dismissing the carter.

«Twelve little beds and twelve mats. A few dishes. Here is the seed. And here are the doves. There is the money. And tomorrow there will be many people. Phew! How warm it is! But everything is all right now. And what have You done, Master?...»

And while Jesus tells him, they sit happily at the table.

385. Towards the Western Bank of the Jordan.

17th February 1946.

Jesus is once again on the way. Facing south He walks along the meanderings of the river, looking for someone who may ferry Him across. His apostles are all around Him, discussing the events of the few days spent in Solomon's village and in his house. From what I gather, they remained there until the news of Jesus' presence there spread in hostile surroundings, and when that happened, they left, entrusting old Ananias, now serene in his no longer desolate poverty, with the care of the house, which had just been set in order again.

«Let us hope that their present mood may last» says Bartholomew.

«If we come back here often, as the Master says, we will keep them in the same frame of mind» replies Judas of Alphaeus.

«He was weeping, poor old soul! He had become fond of us...» says Andrew, who is also deeply moved.

«And I liked his last speech. He spoke as a wise man, Master, didn't he?» says James of Zebedee.

«He spoke as a holy man, I would say!» exclaims Thomas.

«Yes, he did. And I will bear in mind his desire» replies Jesus.

«What did he say exactly? I had gone with John to tell Michael's mother to remember to do what the Master had told her, so I do not know» says the Iscariot.

«He said: “Lord, if You happen to go through the village of my daughter-in-law, tell her that I bear her no grudge and that I am happy that I am no longer forsaken, because thus the judgement of God will not be so severe on her. Tell her to bring up my grandchildren in the faith of the Messiah, so that I will have them with me in Heaven, and as soon as I am in the peace of God, I will pray for them and for their good health.” And I will tell her. I will look for the woman and I will tell her because it is the right thing to do» says Jesus.

«Not one word of reproach! On the contrary he is happy that the woman's sin is no longer so grave, since he is not dying of starvation or dereliction. He is admirable!» remarks James of Alphaeus.

«But will the fault of the daughter-in-law really diminish in the eyes of God? That is what I would like to know!» says Judas of Alphaeus.

The opinions are conflicting. Matthew asks Jesus: «What is Your opinion, Master? Will the situation remain as before or will it change?»

«It will change...»

«See... I was right!» exclaims Thomas triumphantly.

But Jesus beckons to them to let Him speak and He says: «It will change for the old man, also in Heaven as it changed on the Earth because of his indulgent kindness. It will not change for the woman. Her sin will always cry in the eyes of God. Only if she should repent, His severe judgement may change. And I will tell her.»

«Where does she live?»

«At Masada, with her brothers.»

«And do You wish to go as far as that?»

«Those places are to be evangelized as well...»

«And what about Keriioth?»

«We will come back to Keriioth from Masada, and we will go to Juttah, Hebron, Bethzur, Bether, and we shall be back in Jerusalem for Pentecost.»

«Masada is one of Herod's places...»

«What does it matter? It is a fortress. But he is not there. And even if he were!... It will not be the presence of a man to prevent Me from being the Saviour.»

«Where shall we cross the river?»

«Near Gilgal. From there we will go along the coast, following the mountains. The nights are cool and the new moon of Civ is bright in the serene sky.»

«If we are going through those places, why do we not go to the mountain where You fasted? It is fair that everybody should become acquainted with it» says Matthew.

«We shall go there as well. But there is a boat. Negotiate the price so that we may cross to the other side.»

386. At Gilgal. The Beggar Oglia. The Twelve Stones.

18th February 1946.

I do not know what Gilgal is like now. When Jesus enters it, it is an ordinary Palestinian town, quite densely populated, situated on a low hill covered mainly with vineyards and olive groves. But there is so much sunshine, that cereals also can be cultivated, at random, under trees or between rows of vines. And they ripen notwithstanding the foliage above them, because the sun is very warm and the effect of the nearby desert is felt.

There is the dust, noise, dirt and confusion of market days. And inflexible as fate, there are the usual zealous not convinced Pharisees and scribes, who are discussing with great gestures and displaying their learning in the best corner of the square, pretending they do not see Jesus or they do not know Him.

Jesus goes straight on and takes His meal in a little side square, almost in the outskirts, well shaded by interlaced branches of all kinds of plants. I am under the impression that it is part of the mountain recently annexed to the village and still keeping a semblance of its natural state.

The first person to approach Jesus, Who is eating bread and olives, is a man in ragged clothes. He asks for a little bread. Jesus gives him His portion with all the olives that He is holding in His hand.

«And what about You? You know that we have no money» remarks Peter. «We gave everything to Ananias...»

«It does not matter. I am not hungry. But I am thirsty...»

The beggar says: «There is a well at the rear of the village... But why did You give me everything? You could have given me half of Your bread... If You are not disgusted at taking it back...»

«Eat it. I can do without it. But to remove every possible doubt that I feel disgusted with you, give Me with your own hands just a mouthful and I will eat it to be your friend...»

The man's face, so far sad and gloomy, brightens in a smile of surprise and he says: «Oh! It is the first time since I became poor Oglá that anyone says to me that he wants to be my friend!» and he gives a mouthful of bread to Jesus. And he asks: «Who are You? What is Your name?»

«I am Jesus of Nazareth, the Rabbi of Galilee.»

«Ah!... I heard of You from other people... But... are You not the Messiah?...»

«I am.»

«And You, the Messiah, are You so good to beggars? The Tetrarch gets his servants to beat us, if he sees us in his way...»

«I am the Saviour. I do not beat, I love.» The man stares at Him. And he begins to weep slowly. «Why are you weeping?»

«Because... I would like to be saved... Are You no longer thirsty, Lord? I could take You to the well and speak to You...»

Jesus understands that the man wishes to confess something and He gets up saying: «Let us go.»

«I am coming, too!» exclaims Peter.

«No. I shall be back at once, in any case... And we must respect those who repent.»

He goes with the man behind a house, beyond which there is the country.

«The well is over there... Have a drink and then You can listen to me.»

«No, man. Pour first your anxiety into Me and then... I will drink. And perhaps I shall have for My thirst a fountain even more pleasant than the water of this well.»

«Which, Master?»

«Your repentance. Let us go under those trees. The women are watching us here. Come» and laying His hand on the man's shoulder He leads him towards a thicket of olive-trees.

«How do You know that I am guilty and that I am repentant?»

«Oh!... Speak and be not afraid of Me.»

«Lord... We were seven brothers born of one father, but I was born of the woman whom my father married when he became a widower. And I was hated by the other six. When my father died, he left the same amount to each of us. But after his death my six brothers bribed the judges, took everything away from me, and drove my mother and me away with infamous accusations. She died when I was sixteen years old... and she died of want... And since then no one has ever loved me...» he says weeping uncontrollably. He calms down and goes on: «My six brothers were rich and happy and they thrived also with what belonged to me, while I was dying of starvation, because I was taken ill assisting my feeble mother... But God struck them one by one. I cursed and hated them so much, that I set the evil eye on them. Was I doing the wrong thing? Certainly. I know. And I knew. But how could I not hate them and curse them? The last one, who in actual fact was the third born, was withstanding all curses, nay he was prospering with the property of the other five, as he legally got the goods of the three younger brothers who had died without dependants, and he married the widow of the first born who had died childless, and he had fraudulently taken possession of the property of the second born, cheating his widow and orphans whom he deprived of most of their share with tricks and loans. And when he met me by chance at the market, where I used to go as the servant of a rich man

to sell victuals, he insulted and beat me... I met him one evening... I was alone and he was alone. He was intoxicated with wine... I was intoxicated with recollections and hatred... It was the tenth anniversary of my mother's death... He insulted me and my dead mother... He called her "filthy bitch" and he called me "son of the hyena..." Lord... if he had not insulted my mother, I would have endured him But he insulted her... I caught him by the neck. We struggled I only wanted to beat him... But he slipped and fell on the ground... and the sloping ground was covered with slippery grass... and below there was a ravine and a torrent... Drunk as he was, he turned over and fell... They are still looking for him after so many years... He is buried among the stones and the sand of one of the torrents in Lebanon. I did not go back to my master. And he never went back to Caesarea Paneas. I have been wandering without peace... Ah! The curse of Cain! To be afraid of living... and to be afraid of dying I was taken ill... And later... I heard of You... But I was afraid They told me that You could read the hearts of men. And the rabbis of Israel are so bad!... They do not know what mercy is... You, the Rabbi of rabbis, were my terror... And I fled before You. And yet, I would like to be forgiven...» He is prostrated on the ground and is weeping...

Jesus looks at him and whispers: «I will take also those sins upon Me!... Listen, son! I am Mercy, not terror. I have come also for you. Be not ashamed before Me... I am the Redeemer. Do you want to be forgiven? Of what?»

«Of my crime. Why ask me? I killed my brother.»

«You said: "I only wanted to beat him" because you had been offended and you were angry. But when you hated and cursed not one, but six brothers, you were not offended or angry. You did it as spontaneously as you breathe. Hatred and curses, and the delight in seeing them struck was your spiritual bread, is that right?»

«Yes, Lord. It was my bread for ten years.»

«So, your greatest crime began the moment you hated and cursed. You are six times the murderer of your brothers.»

«But, Lord, they had ruined and hated me... And my mother died of starvation...»

«Do you mean that you had a reason to avenge yourself?»

«Yes, I do.»

«You had no reason. It was for God to punish. You should have loved. And God would have blessed you on the Earth and in Heaven.»

«So, will He never bless me?»

«Repentance brings blessings again. *But how much grief, how much anxiety you caused yourself! You caused much more through your hatred than your brothers did!...*»

«That is true! My horror has lasted twenty-six years. Oh! forgive me in the name of God. You can see that I am grieved for my sin! I am not asking anything for my life. I am a beggar and I am ill. And I wish to remain such, to suffer and expiate. But give me the peace of God! I offered sacrifices at the Temple and I starved to put together the money for the holocaust. But I could not confess my crime and I do not know whether the sacrifice was accepted.»

«It was not. Even if you offered one every day, what value could it have for you, when you were acting with falsehood? *A rite which is not preceded by a sincere confession of sins is superstitious and of no value.* It is sin added to sin, and thus more than useless. *A sacrilegious offer.* What did you say to the priest?»

«I used to say: "I have sinned out of ignorance, doing what the Lord had forbidden, and I want to expiate." I used to think: "I know in what I have sinned, and God knows. But I cannot tell any man openly. God, Who sees all things, knows that I am thinking of my sin."»

«Mental reservations, mean expedients. The Most High hates them. *When one sins, one must expiate.* Never do that again.»

«No. Lord. And shall I be forgiven? Or must I go and confess everything? And pay with my life for the life I took? All I want is to die with God's forgiveness.»

«*Live to expiate.* You cannot give her husband back to the widow or their father to the children... One ought to think before killing, before letting hatred become one's master! But rise and walk along the new way. On your way, you will find My disciples. They are certainly in the mountains of Judaea and you will find them if you go from Tekoah to Bethlehem and farther towards Hebron. Tell them that Jesus has sent you and that He said that before Pentecost He will go up to Jerusalem via Bethzur and Bether. Look for Elias, Joseph, Levi, Matthias, John, Benjamin, Daniel, Isaac. Will you remember those names? Apply especially to them. Let us go now...»

«But are You not having a drink?»

«I have drunk your tears. A soul returning to God! There is nothing more refreshing for Me.»

«So, I am forgiven?! You said: “Returning to God”...»

«Yes. You are forgiven. But never hate anybody again.»

The man bends again, as he had stood up, and kisses Jesus' feet.

They go back to the apostles and find them disputing with some scribes.

«Here is the Master. He will be able to reply to you and tell you that you are sinners.»

«What is the matter?» asks Jesus, Who greets respectfully but is not greeted in return.

«Master, they are harassing us with questions and mockery...»

«*It is an act of mercy to put up with troublesome people.*»

«But they are offending You. They are making You a laughing stock... and people hesitate. See? We had been successful in gathering many people... But who is left now? Two or three women...»

«Oh! no! You have also a man, a filthy man! He is even too much for you! But, Master, don't You think that You are becoming too contaminated, since You always say that filth disgusts You?» says scoffingly a young scribe pointing at the beggar beside Jesus.

«He is not filth. He is not the filth which disgusts Me. He is a “poor man”. *Poor people do not disgust.* Their misery must inspire souls with feelings of brotherly pity. I feel disgusted with moral miseries, with fetid hearts, with souls torn to shreds, with injured spirits.»

«And do You know that he is not such?»

«I know that he believes and hopes in God and in His mercy, now that he has become acquainted with it.»

«Acquainted? Where does it live? Tell us, that we may go as well to see its face. Ah! The terrible God, Whom Moses did not dare to look at, must have a dreadful face even in His mercy, even if His rigour has softened after so many

centuries!» insists the young scribe laughing and his laughter is more negatory than blasphemy.

«*I, Who am speaking to you, am the Mercy of God!*» shouts Jesus, standing upright, dazzling with the power of His eyes and gesture.

I do not know why the other one is not terrified... But although he does not run away, he can no longer be sarcastic and he becomes silent, while another scribe replaces him: «Oh! how many useless words! We would only like to be able to believe. We could not ask for anything better. But in order to believe, we must have proofs. Master, do You know what Gilgal is to us?»

«Do you think that I am a blockhead?» says Jesus. And in the tone of a psalm, in a slow rather drawling utterance, He begins: «“And Joshua, rising before daybreak, struck camp. And he set out from Shittim with all the Israelites and arrived at the Jordan where they stopped for three days, after which the heralds went through the camp shouting: 'When you see the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord your God carried by the levitical priests, you must leave as well and follow them, between you and the Ark, however, keep a distance of two thousand cubits, so that you may see from afar which road you have to take as you have never gone this way before and...' ”»

«That is enough. You know the lesson. Now, in order to believe, we would like a similar miracle from You. At Passover we were dinned in the Temple with the news brought by a boatman that You had stopped the river in spate. Now, if for an ordinary man You did so much, we, who are much more than a common man, ask You to go down into the Jordan with Your disciples and cross it without wetting your feet, as Moses did at the Red Sea and Joshua at Gilgal. Come on! Sorcery serves only with ignorant people. But we shall not be deceived by Your necromancy, although it is well known that You are familiar with Egyptian secrets and magical formulae.»

«I do not need them.»

«Let us go down to the river and we will believe in You.»

«It is written: “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test”!»

«You are not God! You are a poor fool. You are one who subverts ignorant crowds. That is easy for You because Beelzebub is with You. But with us, who are adorned with the power of exorcism, You are less than nothing» says a scribe biting.

«Do not offend Him! Beg Him to satisfy our request. The way you treat Him, He will lose both heart and power. Come on, Rabbi of Nazareth! Give us a proof and we will worship You» says a venomous old scribe, who is more hostile in his crooked flattery than the others in their open fierceness.

Jesus looks at him. He then turns southwestwards and stretching His arms out He says: «The desert of Judah is over there and there the Evil Spirit asked Me to put the Lord My God to the test. And I replied: “Be off, Satan! It is written that God only is to be worshipped; He is not to be put to the test. And He is to be given priority over flesh and blood.” I say the same to you.»

«Are You giving us the name of Satan? Are You? Ah! Curse You!» and behaving more like urchins than doctors of the Law, they start picking up stones on the ground to strike Him, and they shout: «Go away! May You be damned forever!»

Jesus looks at them fearlessly. He paralyses them in their sacrilegious gesture, picks up His mantle and says: «Let us go! Man, go ahead of Me» and He goes back towards the well and into the olive-grove of the confession... And He lowers His head, looking utterly crushed, while two unrestrainable tears stream down His pale face.

They arrive at a road. Jesus stops and says to the beggar: «I cannot give you any money, because I have none. I bless You. Goodbye. Do what I told you.» They part...

The apostles are distressed. They cast furtive glances at one another...

Jesus breaks the silence resuming the tone of the psalm interrupted by the scribe: «“And the Lord said to Joshua: 'Choose out twelve men, one man from each tribe, and tell them to take from mid-Jordan, where the feet of the priests stood, twelve very hard stones and to put them in the camp where you will put up your tents tonight'. And Joshua called twelve men chosen from the children of Israel, one from each tribe, and he said to them: 'Pass on before the Ark of the Lord your God into mid-Jordan, and each of you take one stone on his shoulder, matching the number of the tribes of Israel, to make a memorial in your midst. And when in future your sons ask you: What do these stones mean? you will reply to them: The waters of the Jordan disappeared in front of the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord, when it crossed them, and these stones are an everlasting reminder of this to the Israelites.”»

He then raises His head, and turns His eyes towards the apostles who are looking at Him. In a different voice, the voice of the moments of deepest sadness, He says: «And the Ark was in the river. Not the waters, but the sky opened out of respect for the Word Who was sanctifying them and making them more holy than the Ark did, standing in the bed of the river. And the Word chose twelve stones. He chose very hard ones, because they are to last until the end of the world, and they are to be the foundation of the new Temple and of the eternal Jerusalem. Twelve. Remember that. That is to be the number. And then He chose twelve more as second witnesses. The first shepherd-disciples and Abel the leper and Samuel the cripple, those cured first... and grateful... They are very hard as well, because they will have to withstand the blows of Israel, who hates God!... Who hates God!...»

How sorrowful and feeble is Jesus' voice – it almost sounds like a boy's voice – as He weeps over the harshness of Israel. He resumes: «Time and men scattered the memorial stones in the river... Hatred will scatter My twelve on the Earth. On the banks of the river, time and men have destroyed the remembrance altar... The first and the second stones can no longer be identified: the bitter hatred of demons, who dwell not only in hell, but also in the hearts of men, have used them for all purposes. Some have been used also for killing. And how do I know that among the stones lifted against Me, there were no splinters of the very hard stones chosen by Joshua? Very hard! Hostile! Oh! Very hard! Also among My followers some perverted ones will act as a pavement for the demons marching against Me... and they will become stones to strike Me... and they will no longer be the chosen stones... but demons... Oh! James, My dear brother! How hard is Israel to its Lord!» and, what has never been seen before, Jesus, overwhelmed by I do not know which impressively deep depression, leans on the shoulder of James of Alphaeus and embraces him weeping...

387. Towards Engedi. Taking Leave of Judas Iscariot and Simon Zealot.

19th February 1946.

They must have continued their journey during the moonlit night, and after resting for a few hours in a cave, they have set out again at dawn. And they are

obviously fatigued after walking on crushed stones, through thorny bushes and creeping liane, which often entangle their feet. Simon Zealot is leading the way, as he appears to be thoroughly familiar with the area and he apologises for the difficult road, as if he were the cause of the difficulty.

«When we are once again up on those mountains, which you can see, it will be easier and I promise you plenty wild honey and ample water...»

«Water? I will dive into it! The sand has corroded my feet as if I had been walking on salt and my skin is smarting. How horrible these places are! Oh! One feels that we are close to the districts that Heaven punished with fire! The stench is still in the wind, in the earth, in the thorns, everywhere!» exclaims Peter.

«And yet it was beautiful here once, is that right, Master?»

«Very beautiful indeed. In the early centuries of the world, this area was a little Eden. The soil was very fertile and rich in spring waters suitable for many purposes. But they were so well arranged that they were a blessing. Then... the disorder of men seemed to affect the elements. And it was the end. The wise men of the heathen world explain the dreadful punishment in many ways. That is, in human terms, at times with superstitious terror. But believe Me: it was only the will of God that changed the order of the elements; and those of the sky involved those of the abyss, they broke loose clashing one against the other in malefic turmoil, thunderbolts set on fire the bitumen that the open veins of the earth had scattered everywhere in great disorder and fire from the bowels of the earth and on the earth and thunderbolts struck the earth, which was shaken in dreadful convulsion, and burned, destroyed and corroded acres of ground, which were previously a paradise, and turned it into the hell that you now see and where existence is impossible.»

The apostles are listening carefully...

Bartholomew asks: «Do You think that, if we could drain the dense salty water, we would find the ruins of the punished towns on the bottom of the Great Sea?»

«Certainly. And almost intact; because the muddy water acts as mortar on the buried towns. But the Jordan has spread a great deal of sand on them. So they are buried twice, that they may never rise again, the symbol of those who, persisting in sin, are inexorably buried by God's malediction and by the overbearance of Satan, whom they served so keenly in this life.»

«And did Mattathias of John of Simeon seek refuge here: the just Hasmonean

who is with his son the glory of Israel?»

«Yes, here. Among the mountains and in the deserts and here he reorganised the people and the army, and God was with him.»

«But, at least... It was easier for him, because the Hasidaeans were more just than the Pharisees are with You!»

«Oh! It is easy to be more just than Pharisees! Even easier than it is for this thorn to prick me and stick in my leg... Look here!» exclaims Peter, who, while listening did not look where he was walking and is entangled in a thorny bush which has made his leg bleed.

«There are not so many up in the mountains. See how they are already thinning out?» says Simon Zealot comforting him.

«H'm! You know the place well...»

«I lived here when I was in exile and persecuted...»

«Oh! In that case...»

In fact the greenery is becoming less troublesome on the little mountains, which, however, are not very shady and the herbs on them are rather short but sweet-smelling and are strewn with flowers forming a many-coloured carpet. Bees suck them and then fly to the caves on the mountain sides where they deposit the honey in natural hives under curtains of ivy and honeysuckle.

Simon Zealot goes into one of the caves and comes out with combs of golden honey; he then goes into other caves until he has enough for everybody, and offers them to the Master and his friends who relish the sweet trickling substance.

«I wish we had some bread! It is delicious!» says Thomas.

«Oh! It is very good also without it! Much better than Philistine ears of corn. And... let us hope that no Pharisee will come to tell us that we cannot eat it!» says James of Zebedee.

They eat while walking and arrive at a reservoir, into which the waters of some streams flow and are then conveyed I know not where. The water that overflows from the basin is cool and clear, as it is protected from the sun and from pollution by the vault of the huge rock, in which the cistern has been dug; it flows down into a tiny lake in the blackish siliceous rock.

The apostles are evidently delighted in taking off their clothes and bathing in turns in the unexpected basin. But they wanted Jesus to be the first to enjoy it, «so that their bodies might be sanctified» says Matthew.

They resume walking, they are refreshed but more hungry than before, and the ones who are most hungry, in addition to the honey, nibble at the stalks of wild fennel and other edible shoots, the names of which I do not know.

One enjoys a beautiful view from the tablelands of these strange mountains, the peaks of which seem to have been cut off by a sword-thrust. Parts of other green mountains and of fertile plains can be seen to the south, as well as stretches of the Dead Sea, which is visible to the east, with the remote mountains of the other side fading in the mist of light clouds rising from south-east; the remote green Jordan plain can be seen to the north between mountain crests, while the high mountains of Judaea are visible to the west.

The sun is becoming warm and Peter states that «those clouds over the mountains of Moab are the sign of great heat.»

«We will now go down into the Kidron valley. It is shady...» says Simon.

«The Kidron!?! Oh, how have we come so soon to the Kidron?»

«Yes, Simon of Jonas. It is a rough road, but it cuts the journey short! Going along its valley we shall soon be in Jerusalem» explains the Zealot.

«And in Bethany... I should send some of you to Bethany, to tell the sisters to take Eglah to Nike. She begged Me so much, and quite rightly. The childless widow will also have a holy love and the orphan girl a true Israelite mother, who will bring her up in our old faith and in Mine. I would like to go too... A peaceful rest for My saddened spirit... In Lazarus' house the heart of the Christ finds but love... But the journey I want to make before Pentecost is a long one!»

«Send me, Lord. And with me, someone with good legs. We will go to Bethany and then to Kerioth and we will meet there» says the Iscariot with enthusiasm. The others, instead, while waiting for someone to be selected for the journey, which would separate them from the Master, are not at all enthusiastic.

Jesus is thinking, and while thinking, He looks at Judas. He is undecided whether He should agree or not.

Judas insists: «Say yes, Master. Make me happy!...»

«You are the least suitable, Judas, to go to Jerusalem!»

«Why, Lord? I know the town better than anybody else!»

«That is why!... The town is not only well known to you, but it affects you more than anybody else.»

«Master, I give You my word that I will not stop in Jerusalem and I will not look for anybody from Israel... But let me go. I will arrive at Kerioth before You and...»

«And you will not put pressure on anybody to pay human homage to Me.»

«No, Master, I will not. I promise.» Jesus is still pensive.

«Why do You hesitate so much, Master? Why do You not trust me?»

«You are so weak, Judas. And as soon as you go away from the Strength, you fall! You have been so good for some time! Why do you want to become upset and grieve Me?»

«No, Master, I do not want that! But one day I shall have to be without You! And then? What shall I do, if I do not prepare beforehand?»

«Judas is right» several of the apostles say.

«All right!... Go, then. Go with My brother James.»

The others give sighs of relief.

James sighs heavily but he says kindly: «Yes, my Lord! Bless us and we will depart.»

Simon Zealot feels sorry for him and says: «Master, fathers willingly replace their children to make them happy. I took him as my son together with Judas. Time has gone by, but my mind is still the same. Listen to my prayer... Send me with Judas of Simon. I am old, but I am as strong as a young man, and Judas will not have to complain about me.»

«No, it is not fair that you should sacrifice yourself, leaving the Master, in my place. It would certainly grieve you not to be with Him...» says James of Alphaeus.

«Grief is relieved by the joy of leaving you with the Master. Later you will tell me what you have done... In any case... I go to Bethany willingly...» concludes

the Zealot, as if he wished to belittle the value of his offer.

«All right. You two will go. In the meantime let us proceed towards that village. Who will go up to get some bread in the name of God?»

«I will! I will!» They all want to go.

But Jesus holds back Judas of Kerioth. When they have all gone, Jesus takes his hands and speaks to him face to face. He seems to be wanting to instill His thought into him, influencing him to such an extent that Judas may not have any other thoughts than those wanted by Jesus. «Judas... Do not harm yourself, My dear Judas! Have you not been calmer and happier for some time, free from the burden of your lower ego, of the human ego, which is so easily at the mercy of Satan and of the world? Of course you know that you have! Well, protect your peace and your welfare. Do not injure yourself, Judas. I can read you. You are in such a happy period at this moment! Oh! If I could only keep you thus, at the cost of all My Blood, and destroy the last bulwark in which a great enemy of yours hides, and make you completely spiritual, with spiritual intellect, spiritual love, completely a... spirit!»

Judas, face to face with Jesus, his hands in the hands of the Master, is almost dumbfounded. He whispers: «Injure myself? Last bulwark? Which one?...»

«Which one?! You know. You know how you injure yourself! *By cherishing thoughts of human grandeur and friendships*, which you suppose are useful to procure such grandeur. Believe Me, Israel does not love you. It hates you as it hates Me, as it hates whoever may seem a probable victor. And since you do not conceal your ambition to be such, you are hated. Do not believe their false words, their deceitful questions, by which they pretend to take an interest in your plans in order to help you. They circumvent you to hurt you, to find out and injure you. *I am not begging you on My behalf, but only on your own.* If I am the target of iniquity, I am still the Lord. They may torture My body and kill it. But not beyond that. But in your case, *they would kill your soul...* Shun temptation, My friend! Tell Me that you will shun it! Speak this word of peace to your poor persecuted worried Master!»

Jesus clasps him in His arms and, cheek to cheek, speaks in his ear and His golden hair mixes with the thick dark curls of Judas.

«I know that I have to suffer and die. I know that My crown will be the crown of a martyr. I am aware that My Blood will be My purple. *I came for that.* Because

through such martyrdom I will redeem Mankind, and love has been urging Me for endless time to do so. *But I would not like any of My followers to be lost.* Oh! All men are dear to Me, because in them there is the image and likeness of My Father and the immortal souls that He created. But you, My loved and beloved ones, you, the blood of My blood and the apples of My eyes, must not be lost! Oh! No torture could be like that, not even if Satan, who is Sin, Horror, Disgust, should pierce Me with his weapons burning with the sulphur of hell and he should bite and grasp Me, no torture could make Me suffer as much as I would for one of My chosen ones who should be lost... Judas, My Judas! Shall I ask My Father to let Me suffer My dreadful Passion three times, so that two of them may be offered to save you alone? Tell Me, My friend, and I will do that. I will ask Him to multiply My suffering infinitely for that purpose. I love you, Judas, I love you so much. And I would like to give you Myself, to make you Myself, to save you from yourself...»

«Do not weep, do not say that, Master. I love You, too. I also would give myself to see You strong, respected, feared, triumphant. I may not love You perfectly. I may not think perfectly. But I use and perhaps I misuse my whole being, because I am anxious to see You loved. But I swear to You, I swear on Jehovah, that I will not approach scribes, or Pharisees, or Sadducees, or Jews, or priests. They will say that I am mad. But it does not matter. I shall be quite happy provided You are not worried about me. Are You happy? A kiss, Master, as Your blessing and protection.»

They kiss each other and part while the others are running down the hill displaying cakes and fresh cheeses. They sit down on the green grass of the banks and divide the food, saying that they were made welcome, because the people of the few houses know the shepherd-disciples and are in favour of the Messiah.

«We did not tell them that You are here, otherwise...» concludes Thomas. «We will endeavour to come back here some other time. We must not neglect anybody» replies Jesus.

The meal is over. Jesus stands up and blesses the two who are going to Bethany and who do not wish to wait until evening to set out, as the valley is shady and rich in water.

Jesus and the ten who are staying with Him, lie down on the grass and rest awaiting sunset, when they will go back to the Engedi and Masada road, as I

hear them say.

388. Arrival at Engedi.

20th February 1946.

The pilgrims, although tired after a long march, which they perhaps covered in two stages from sunset to today's dawn, along difficult roads, cannot help uttering exclamations of admiration when, after a long stretch of road along a hill-side, which sparkles like diamonds in the early morning sunshine, they encounter the full view of the Dead Sea displayed before them, from shore to shore. The western side has a narrow plain between the sea and the Judaean type of luxuriant hills in the hinterland, while on the west the mountains drop sheer to the sea basin. One gets the impression that the ground, in a frightful telluric catastrophe, slid down with a clean cut, leaving crevices vertical to the lake, from which torrents descend, more or less rich in waters, destined to evaporate into salt in the dark cursed water of the Dead Sea. In the distance, beyond the lake, and the first range of hills, there are many more slopes, which are beautiful in the morning sunshine. To the north one can see the green-blue mouth of the Jordan, and mountains framing the lake to the south.

It is grand, solemn, sad, majestically admonishing scenery, in which the charming view of the mountains mingles with the gloomy one of the Dead Sea, the sight of which seems to remind one of what sin and the wrath of the Lord can bring. Because such a large expanse of water without a sail, a boat, a bird, an animal crossing it, flying over it or drinking on its shores, is really frightening! And, in contrast to the punitive sight of the sea, there are the wonders of the sun on the little mountains, on the dunes, as far as the desert sands, where the salt crystals look like precious jaspers spread on the sand, on stones, on the rigid stems of desert plants, and thus everything is beautiful, brightened by the diamond dust. And even more wonderful is the fertile aspect of a tableland, about one hundred and fifty metres above sea level, with luxuriant palm-trees and all kinds of trees and vines, and where blue waters flow and a beautiful town has been built, surrounded by a flourishing countryside. When one looks at this landscape, which is so pleasant, charming and flowery, after contemplating the gloomy sight of the sea, the tormenting view of the

eastern shore, which displays a sad tranquillity only in a low green strip of land jutting out into the south-eastern part of the sea, the desolate desert of Judah, the severe view of the Judaean mountains, one seems to awake suddenly from an oppressive nightmare that turns into a gentle vision of peace.

«This is Engedi, celebrated by the poets of our Fatherland. Look how beautiful the district is, nourished by so much graceful water, in the midst of so much desolation! Let us go down and plunge into its gardens, because everything here is garden: meadow, forest, vineyard. This is the ancient Hazazon-Tamar, a name that evokes its beautiful palm-trees, under which it was even more beautiful to build huts and cultivate the land, love one another, and bring up children and raise flocks in the sweet-sounding rustling of palm leaves. This is the pleasant oasis, the survivor of the lands of Eden punished by God, surrounded, like a pearl in a bezel, by paths accessible only to goats and roe-deer, as is written in the Book of Kings, and along those paths there are caves for persecuted, tired and forlorn people. Remember David, our king, and how kind he was to his enemy Saul. This is Hazazon-tamar, now Engedi, the fountain, the blessed town, the beauty from which the enemies moved against Jehoshaphat and the children of his people, who were frightened and were comforted by Jahaziel, son of Zechariah, through whom the Spirit of God spoke. And they won a great victory because they had faith in the Lord and they deserved His help, as they did penance and prayed before the battle. This is the town sung by Solomon, as a comparison of the beauty of the Most Beautiful of all beautiful women. It was mentioned by Ezekiel, because it was nourished by the waters of the Lord... Let us go down! Let us go and take the living Water, that descends from Heaven, to the gem of Israel.» And He starts running down a very steep path, which zigzags down the reddish calcareous rock, that in the spots closest to the sea reaches the edge of the mountain, that is, its ledge. A path that would make giddy even the most expert mountaineers.

The apostles are hardly able to follow Him, and the older ones are left far behind when the Master stops at the first palm-trees and vineyards of the fertile tableland, where crystal-clear waters are gurgling and all kinds of birds are singing. White sheep are grazing under the rustling roofs of palm-trees, of mimosae, of balm-plants, of pistachio-trees and others exhaling sweet or pungent aromas, which mingle with those of rose-bushes, lavender in bloom, cinnamon, myrrh, incense, saffron, jasmines, lilies, lilies of the valley, and of the flower of aloe, which is very big here, of cloves and benzoin, which exude with other resins from incisions in tree-trunks. This is really «the garden enclosed,

the fountain of the garden», and fruit, flowers, sweet scents, beauty are found everywhere! There is no place in Palestine as beautiful as this one, in size and natural charm. While contemplating it, one understands many writings of Eastern poets, where they celebrate the beauty of oases as if they were paradises spread over the Earth.

The apostles, perspiring but full of admiration, join the Master and all together they go down a well-kept road towards the sea shore, where they arrive after crossing several cultivated embankments, from which beneficent waters flow in small smiling cascades to nourish all the vegetation as far as the plain, which ends at the beach. Half-way down the hill-side they enter the white town, among rustling palm-trees and sweet-smelling rosebushes and thousands of flowers of its garden, and they look for lodgings, in the name of God, at the first houses. And the houses, as gentle as nature, open without any hesitation, while their inhabitants ask who is «the Prophet Who looks like Solomon, dressed in linen and beaming with beauty.»... Jesus, with John and Peter, enters a house where there is a widow with her son. The others scatter in various directions, after being blessed by the Master and agreeing to meet in the main square at sunset.

389. Preaching and Miracles at Engedi.

21st February 1946.

Towards sunset, a fiery one that ruddies the very white houses of Engedi and makes the Dead Sea a sheet of black nacre, Jesus sets out towards the main square. He is now with the boy who gave Him hospitality and who is now leading Him through the streets of the town, with its distinctly oriental architecture.

To protect themselves from the sun – which must be very strong in this place so exposed to the heavy expanse of the Salt Sea, which I understand must exhale hot fumes in the summer months, and is so isolated in the midst of a bare desert on which the sun blazes down mercilessly burning the ground – the inhabitants of Engedi built very narrow streets, which look even more narrow because of the projecting eaves and cornices of the dwellings, so that anyone looking up can see only a very thin strip of the deep blue sky.

The buildings are tall, most of them being two storey houses, with vine-clad roof terraces, giving shade and delightful grapes, which must be as sweet as raisins, when they fully ripen in the golden sun and the reflected heat of the walls and terrace-floors. And the vines compete in giving comfort to men and the many birds, from sparrows to doves, which nest in Engedi, with the towering palm-trees, which have grown everywhere, and with magnificent opulent fruit-trees, which have come up in yards, in house gardens, and peep out over little lanes, hanging down white walls with their branches already laden with fruit ripening in the bright sun, reaching down below the numerous archivolts, which in some parts really form tunnels, interrupted here and there for architectonic reasons, and they rise towards the blue sky, a sky so uniform and mellow, that if it could be touched, it would be like touching thick velvet or smooth leather, painted and dyed by a cunning craftsman with that perfect, beautiful, unforgettable hue, which is darker than a turquoise and lighter than a sapphire.

And waters... How many fountains, large and small, must be gurgling in the yards and gardens of houses, among thousands of plants! Walking along the narrow streets, still deserted, as the people are either at work or at home, one can hear them dripping, gurgling, rustling like the notes of a harp played by a hidden harpist. And the charm is increased by the many archivolts and corners that gather together the sounds of the waters, amplifying them and increasing them through numerous echoes, composing a harmonious arpeggio.

And endless palm-trees!... Where there is a little square, even if only the size of a room, the very tall slender trunks rise towards the sky, and their tops, tufts of rustling leaves tied like brushes round the trunks, hardly move up there, and their shadows at midday fall perpendicular to the little square, covering it completely, whilst now they are forming fantastical designs on the higher terraces.

The town is clean as compared with Palestinian towns. Perhaps the fact that houses are so close together and each has a yard and cultivated garden has helped to teach the population not to throw garbage into the streets, but to gather such waste and animal excrement into special dunghills to be used as fertilizer for trees and flower-beds, or it is... a very rare case of cleanliness. The little streets are clean, dried by the sun and there is no unpleasant display of waste vegetables, old sandals, dirty rags, excrement and the like, as can be seen even in Jerusalem, in streets quite near the town centre. There is the first farmer coming back from his work, riding a little grey donkey. To protect the animal

from flies, the man has caparisoned it with jasmine branches and the beast is now trotting away shaking its ears and harness-bells under the wavy scented screen of branches. When the man turns round and greets him, the boy says: «Come to the main square. You will hear the Rabbi who is staying with me.»

Now there is a flock of sheep invading the street coming from a little square beyond which one can see the country background. They proceed close to one another, each putting its feet in the places where the one preceding it puts them, with their heads stooped as if they were too heavy for their necks – so thin compared with their fat bodies – trotting in their strange fashion and their obese bodies looking like bundles resting on four sticks...

Jesus, John and Peter imitate the man who is with them, and they lean against the warm wall of a house to let them pass. A man and a boy are following the flock. They look and greet. The young man says: «Put the sheep in the fold and come to the main square with your relatives. The Rabbi of Galilee is here with us and He is going to speak to us.»

And there is the first woman to come out, surrounded by a group of children, going I wonder where. The young man says: «Come with John and his sons to hear the Rabbi, Whom they call the Messiah.»

The houses open little by little in the oncoming evening, showing green backgrounds of gardens, or peaceful yards where doves are having their last feed. The youth peeps in at each door and shouts: «Come to listen to the Rabbi, the Lord.»

They finally come to a straight road, the only straight one in this town, which was not built as people would have liked, but as palm-trees or the mighty age-old pistachio-trees wanted, and which are respected as notables by the citizens, who are indebted to them for not dying of sunstroke. At the end there is a square where many trunks of palm-trees act as columns. It looks like a hypostyle hall of temples and ancient palaces, which consisted of a large room with columns placed at symmetrical intervals forming a stony forest to support the roof. The palm-trees here act as columns and, thick as they are, with their dense rustling foliage they form an emerald ceiling over the white square in the middle of which there is a tall square fountain full of crystal-clear water gushing out from a little column in the centre of the basin, and falling into lower basins, where animals can water. Tame docile doves have rushed to it just now and they are drinking or dancing a minuet with their little pink legs on the upper edge, or

they are spraying their feathers which shine increasing their iridescent hues as the drops of water rest for a moment on the barbs of the feathers.

There are many people. And there are the eight apostles who had gone in various directions looking for lodgings, and each of them has gathered some followers, who are anxious to hear Him, Whom the apostle has pointed out as the promised Messiah. The apostles hasten towards the Master from all directions trailing, like comets, the little groups they have conquered.

Jesus raises His hand to bless His disciples and the people of Engedi.

Judas of Alphaeus speaks on behalf of everyone: «Here, Master and Lord. We have done what You told us and these people are aware that the Grace of God is among them. But they want also the Word. Many know You having heard of You. Many because they met You in Jerusalem. Everybody, and the women in particular, wish to know You, and first of all, their head of the synagogue. There he is. Come here, Abraham.»

The man, who is very old, comes forward. He is moved. He would like to speak, but moved as he is, he cannot find any of the words he had prepared. He stoops to kneel down, leaning on his stick, but Jesus stops him, embracing him at once and saying: «Peace to the old just servant of God!» and the man, who is more and more moved, can only reply: «Praise be to God! My eyes have seen the Promised Messiah! What else shall I ask of the Lord?» and raising his arms, in hieratic attitude, he intones David's 40th psalm: «“I waited anxiously for the Lord and He has stooped to me.”» But he does not recite it all. He repeats only the passages which are more appropriate to the occasion:

«“He heard my cry and has pulled me out of the pit of misery, out of the slough of the marsh... He has put a new song in my mouth. Happy the man who puts his trust in the Lord. How many wonders You have done for us, o Lord my God! You have no equal. I would like to proclaim them again and again, but they are more than I can count. You, Who wanted no sacrifice or oblation, opened my ear... (he is moved more and more).»

It is written that I must do Your will...
I have always loved Your Law from the depths of my being.
I have always proclaimed Your righteousness in the Great Assembly.
I did not close my lips, as You know well, o Lord.

I have never kept Your righteousness to myself,
but I have proclaimed Your faithfulness and saving help...
For Your part, o Lord, do not withhold Your kindness from me...
More misfortunes beset me than I can count

(he is now weeping copiously, uttering his words in a voice that is even more
trembling and senile because of his tears)...

I am a poor wretch, but the Lord takes care of me.
You are my help, my protector, my God, do not delay!.....”

That is the psalm, my Lord, and I add of my own: “Say to me: 'Come' and I will
say to You what the psalm says: 'Here I come!'”.)»

He becomes silent and weeps with all his faith gathered in his eyes dimmed by
age.

People explain: «His daughter died and left young grandchildren to him. His
wife has become blind and dull-witted through grief, and they do not know what
happened to their only son. He disappeared all of a sudden...»

Jesus lays His hand on the shoulder of the old man and says to him: «The
sufferings of the just are as swift as a swallow, as compared with the duration of
the eternal reward. But we shall give back to Sarah the eyesight of bygone days
and the intelligence of her youth, so that she may comfort your old age.»

«Her name is Colomba» informs one of the people...

«She is his princess. But listen to the parable I am going to tell You...»

«Will You not free first from darkness the eyes and the mind of my wife, so that
she also may relish Wisdom?» asks the old head of the synagogue anxiously.

«Do you believe that God can do everything and that His power spreads over the
universe?»

«Yes, my Lord, I do. I remember one evening many years ago. I was then
happy, but even in joy I was a believer. Because that is what man is like! While
he is happy, he can also forget about God. But I believed in God also in those
happy days, when my wife was young and healthy, and my daughter Eliza was
growing as beautiful as a palm tree and was already engaged, and Elisha was as
handsome as she was beautiful, but he exceeded her in strength as befits a man...
I had gone with the boy to the fountains near the vineyard, which is Colomba's
dowry, while my wife and daughter remained at home to weave the girl's

trousseau... But perhaps I am boring You... A poor wretch dreams remembering
his past happiness... but other people are not interested...»

«Go on, go on!»

«I had gone with the boy... The fountains... If You came along the western road,
You know where they are... The fountains were at the boundary of the blessed
place, and looking beyond the desert, one could see the white stones of the
Roman road, which was then still visible among the sands of Judah... Later...
that landmark also disappeared! It does not matter if a landmark disappears,
among sands! But it is bad that the sign of God, sent to point You out, should
dissolve in the hearts of Israel. In too many hearts! My son said: “Father! Look!
A great caravan, with horses and camels, and servants and gentlemen going
towards Engedi. They are perhaps coming to the fountains before it gets
dark...” As I was attending to the vine-branches, I raised my eyes, so tired after
the abundant vintage, and I saw... The men were really coming to the fountains.
They dismounted, they saw me and they asked whether they could camp there
for one night.

“Engedi has hospitable homes and it is not far” I replied.

“No. We will be keeping watch to be ready to flee, because Herod is pursuing
us. Our guards will be able to control every road from here and it will be easy to
escape from those seeking us.” “What sin have you committed?” I asked, as I
was surprised and willing to show them the caves of our mountains, as is our
sacred custom to assist those who are persecuted. And I added: “You are
strangers and you come from different places... I do not see how you can have
sinned against Herod...”

“We have worshipped the Messiah Who was born in Bethlehem of Judah and to
Whom we were led by the star of the Lord. Herod is looking for Him, and that is
why he wants to find us, so that we may tell him where the Child is. But he is
looking for Him to kill Him. We will perhaps die in the deserts, on a long
unknown road, but we will not reveal where is the Holy Child, Who descended
from Heaven!..”

The Messiah! The dream of every true Israelite! My dream! And He was in the
world! In Bethlehem of Judah as it was foretold!... And pressing my son to my
heart, I asked for more information and details, saying: “Listen, Elisha!
Remember! You will certainly see Him!” I was already fifty years old and I no
longer hoped to see Him... neither did I hope to live so long as to see Him grown

into a man... Elisha... can no longer worship Him...»

The old man is weeping again. But he collects himself and says: «The three Wise Men spoke kindly and patiently and they described You in Your holy infancy, and Your Mother and father... I could have spent the night with them... but Elisha was falling asleep in my lap. I said goodbye to the three Wise Men and I promised that I would not say one word that might be detrimental to them. But I told Colomba everything in our bedroom and that was our only joyful expectation in our subsequent misfortunes. Later we heard of the slaughter... and for years I did not know whether You were alive. Now I know. But I am the only one, because Eliza died, Elisha is no longer with us, and Colomba cannot understand the happy news... But my faith in the power of God, which was already alive, became perfect after that remote evening, when three men, of different races, bore witness to the power of God by being united, through the voices of stars and of their souls, on the road of God, to worship His Word.»

«And your faith will be rewarded. Now listen.

What is faith? Like the hard seed of a palm-tree, at times it is tiny and consists in a short sentence: “God exists”, supported by one only statement: “I have seen Him.” As the faith Abraham had in Me, through the words of the three Wise Men from the East. Like the faith of our people, from the most ancient patriarchs, transmitted from one generation to the next one, from Adam to his descendants, from Adam sinner, who, however, was believed when he said: “God exists, and we exist because He created us. And I have known Him.” Like the faith that came later, and was more perfect because more deeply based on revelation, and is our heritage, shining with divine manifestations, with angelical apparitions and the light of the Spirit. But still a tiny seed as compared with the Infinite. A tiny seed. But it takes root, and splitting the hard bark of animal nature with its doubts and inclinations, and triumphing over the harmful herbs of passions, of sins, over stale discouragement and corroding vices, over everything, it rises in hearts, it grows, it rushes towards the sun, to Heaven, rising, rising... until it gets rid of the limitations of the flesh and merges with God, in its perfect knowledge and full possession, beyond life and death, in True Life.

Who possesses faith, possesses the way of Life. Who can believe, does not err. A believer sees, knows, serves the Lord and has eternal salvation. The Decalogue is of vital importance to him and each commandment is a gem, which will adorn his future crown. *The promise of the Redeemer is salvation for him.* It does not matter if the believer died before I came to the Earth. His faith makes him equal

to those who now approach Me with faith and love. The deceased just will soon be rejoicing because their faith is about to be rewarded. After fulfilling the will of My Father, I will go to them and say: “Come!”, and *all those who died in Faith will ascend with Me to the Kingdom of the Lord.*

Let your faith be like the palm-trees of your country, which sprout from tiny seeds, but are so determined in growing up straight, that they forget the earth and are in love with the sun, the stars and the sky. *Have faith in Me.* Believe what too few people believe in Israel, and I promise that you will possess the heavenly Kingdom, through forgiveness of the original sin and the just reward to all those who practise My doctrine, which is the most sweet perfection of the perfect Decalogue of God.

I will stay with you today and tomorrow, which is the holy Sabbath, and I will leave at dawn the day after the Sabbath. *Let those who suffer come to Me! Let those who are in doubt come to Me! Let those who want Life come to Me! Without any fear, because I am Mercy and Love.»*

And Jesus makes a wide gesture to bless and dismiss His listeners, so that they may go and have their evening meal and rest and He is about to set off, when a little old woman, so far concealed by the corner of a narrow street, makes her way through the crowds still around the Master, and amid the crying people, she goes and kneels at Jesus' feet shouting: «May You be blessed and the Most High Who has sent You! And blessed be the womb that bore You, as it is greater than the womb of women, if it was able to bear You!»

The shouting of a man mingles with the woman's: «Colomba! You see! You understand! You are speaking wisely recognising the Lord! Oh! God! God of my fathers! God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob! God of the prophets! God of John, the Prophet! God! My God! Son of the Father! King like the Father! Saviour obedient to the Father! God like the Father, and my God, God of Your servant! May You be blessed, loved, followed, worshipped forever!»

And the old head of the synagogue kneels down beside his wife, embracing her with his left arm, pressing her to his heart, he stoops and makes her stoop to kiss the feet of the Saviour, while the joyful shouting of the crowds is so loud that it makes tree-trunks vibrate and frightens the doves, which take flight from the nests where they were already resting and fly over Engedi, as if they wished to spread over the whole town the news that the Saviour is within its walls.

390. Elisha of Engedi.**22nd February 1946.**

They must have advanced the time of their departure, and perhaps the inhabitants of Engedi advised them to do so, because it is the dead of night and the moon almost full illuminates the town with a very bright light. The narrow streets look like silver ribbons lying among the cube-shaped houses and garden walls, the lime of which seems to have been changed into sculptural marble by the magic rays of moonlight. Palm-trees and other trees look mysterious, enveloped in the lunar phosphorescence. Fountains and rivulets are little waterfalls and diamond necklaces. And from tree branches nightingales pour forth strings of golden notes thus adding their wonderful voices to the gurgle of waters, which can be heard very clearly in the night.

The town is asleep. But there are some persons with Jesus, Who is departing. They are the men of the houses that gave hospitality to Jesus and His disciples and they have been joined by other people. The head of the synagogue is walking beside Jesus. Oh! He does not want to stop accompanying Him, not even when Jesus begs him to go back, before proceeding into the open country. They go straight towards the road leading to Masada, not the lower road along the Dead Sea, which I hear is unhealthy and dangerous at night; but to the internal one, built on the slopes, almost on the crests of the hills bordering the lake.

The oasis is wonderful in the lunar night! One seems to be walking in dream-land. Then the oasis comes to an end and palm-trees thin out. Then there is the real mountain, with its forest trees, its meadows and its slopes split by caves, like almost all the Palestinian mountains. But I would say that the caves are more numerous here and their strange mouths, long or flat, straight or slanting, round or like fissures, have a frightening look in the moonlight.

«Abraham, the road is farther down. Why are you climbing up, going the long way round, on this impracticable path?» says one of Engedi, warning the old head of the synagogue.

«Because I have to show something to the Master and ask Him to do one thing more, to be added to the great gifts He has already granted us. But if you are

tired, go home, or wait for me here. I will go by myself» replies the old man, who plods on panting, along the difficult steep path.

«Oh! no! We will come with you. But it grieves us to see you tire so. You are breathless...»

«Oh! it is not the path!... It is something else! It is a sword piercing my heart... and it is hope swelling it. Come, my children, and you will see how much grief there was in the heart of the man who relieved all your sorrows! How much... not despair, certainly not, but... he who always told you to hope in the Lord Who can do everything, realised he could not possibly expect to have joy any more... I taught you to believe in the Messiah... Do you remember when I used to speak of Him without any fear, when I could do so without harming Him? And you would say to me: "What about Herod's slaughter?" Yes. It was a sore thorn in my heart! But I clung to hope with my whole being... I used to say: "If God sent His star to three men, who were not even from Israel, to invite them to worship the Child Messiah, and He led them by it to the poor house unknown to the rabbis of Israel, to the princes of priests and scribes, if in a dream He informed them not to go back to Herod, in order to save the Child, is it possible that, even with greater power, He did not inform His father and Mother to flee taking the hope of God and of man to a safe place?" And my faith in His safety grew stronger and was attacked in vain by human doubt and the words of other people... And when... and when the deepest grief for a father seized me... when I had to take a living being to the sepulchre and say to him: "Remain here as long as your life lasts... and consider that if the desire for your mother's caresses or any other reason should urge you towards the town, I would have to curse you and be the first to strike you and relegate you where not even my most desolate love could relieve you", when I had to do that... I had to cling even more to my faith in God, the Saviour of His Saviour, and say to myself and to my son... to my leprous son... see?... leprous...: "Let us bow our heads to the will of the Lord and believe in His Messiah! I Abraham... you Isaac, immolated by disease, not by fire, let us offer our sorrow to have a miracle..." And every month, at each new moon, when I came here secretly, laden with foodstuffs... clothes... love... which I had to leave far from my son... because I had to come back to you... my children... to my blind wife, to my feeble-minded wife, whom dreadful grief had made blind and dull... and I had to come back to my childless home... without the peace of reciprocal conscious love... and to my synagogue to speak to you of God... of His wonders... of the beautiful things He spread in the universe... and I could see with my eyes the corroded sight of my son... whom I could not even

defend when I heard people speak ill of him, saying that he was an ungrateful son, or a criminal who had run away from home..., and every month, when making this pilgrimage to the sepulchre of my living son, as I was saying, I used to repeat to him, to encourage him: “The Messiah is on the earth. He will come. He will cure you...” Last year at Passover, when I was looking for You in Jerusalem, during the short time that I was away from my blind wife, I was told: “He really exists. He was here yesterday. He cured also some lepers. He is going round the whole of Palestine curing, comforting, teaching.” Oh! I came back so quickly that I looked like a young man going to a wedding! I did not even stop at Engedi, but I came here and I called my son, my boy, my dying seed, and I said to him: “He will come!” Lord... You have done all sorts of good to our town. You are going away, but there are no sick people left... You have blessed even our trees and animals... And will You not... You have already cured my wife... but will You not have mercy on the fruit of her womb?... A son to a mother! Give back a son to his mother, You, the perfect Son of the Mother of all graces! In the name of Your Mother have mercy on me, on us!...»

Everybody is weeping with the old man who has spoken with such powerful and heart-rending feelings...

And Jesus clasps him in His arms, while he is sobbing, and He says to him: «Do not weep any more! Let us go to your Elisha. Your faith, justice and hope deserve that and much more. Do not weep, father! Do not let us delay any longer from freeing a man from such horror.»

«The moon is setting. The road is a difficult one. Could we not wait until dawn?» say some people.

«No. There are many resinous plants here around us. Pick some branches, light them and let us go» orders Jesus.

They climb up a narrow troublesome path; it looks like the dried bed of alluvial water. The reddish smoky torches crackle spreading a strong smell of resins through the air.

A cave with a narrow opening, almost hidden by thick bushes which have grown near the edges of a spring, appears beyond a narrow tableland split in the middle by a crevice into which flows the water of the spring.

«Elisha has been there, for years... awaiting death or the grace of God...» says the old man in a low voice, pointing at the cavern.

«Call your son. Console him. Tell him not to be afraid, to have faith.»

And Abraham shouts in a loud voice: «Elisha! Elisha! Son!» and he repeats his cry, trembling with fear because there is no reply.

«Is he perhaps dead?» some ask.

«No. Dead, just now, no! At the end of his torture! With no joy, no! Oh! my boy!» moans the father...

«Do not weep. Call him again.»

«Elisha! Elisha! Why are you not answering your...»

«Father! Father! Why have you come at this unusual time? Is mother perhaps dead, and you have come to...» the voice, which was previously far, has come nearer, and a spectre moves the branches concealing the entrance; a horrible spectre, a half-naked corroded skeleton... who seeing so many people with torches and sticks, imagines I wonder what, and withdraws shouting: «Father, why have you betrayed me? I have never left this place... Why have you brought people to stone me?!» The voice moves away and only the undulating branches are left to remind people of the apparition.

«Comfort him! Tell him that the Saviour is here!» urges Jesus.

But the old man has no strength left... He weeps desolately...

Jesus then speaks: «Son of Abraham and of the Father in Heaven, listen. What your just father prophesied, is now being accomplished. The Saviour is here and your friends of Engedi are with Him and the disciples of the Messiah have come to rejoice at your resurrection. Come and be not afraid! Come as far as the crevice, and I will come, too, and I will touch you, and you will be cleansed. Do not be afraid, come to the Lord Who loves you!»

The branches are shifted once again and the frightened leper looks out. He looks at Jesus, a white figure walking on the grass of the tableland and stopping at the edge of the crevice... He looks at the others... and especially at his father who appears to be fascinated and follows Jesus with his arms stretched out and his eyes staring at the face of his leprous son. He is reassured and comes forward. He walks with a limp, because of the sores on his feet... he stretches out his arms with their corroded hands... He comes before Jesus... He looks at Him... And Jesus holds out His beautiful hands, He raises His eyes to Heaven, He gathers, He seems to be gathering within Himself all the light of the infinite stars,

shedding its pure brightness on the impure, putrid, corroded flesh that looks even more dreadful in the red light of the burning branches, which people are waving to give more light.

Jesus leans over the crevice, with the tips of His fingers He touches the tips of the leprous fingers and says: «I want it!», with such a beautiful smile that it cannot be described. He repeats: «I want it!» twice more. He prays and commands with that word...

He takes one step back opening His arms crosswise and says: «And when you have been cleansed preach the Lord, because you belong to Him. Remember that God loved you so that you might be a good Israelite and a good son. Get married and bring your children up for the Lord. Your very bitter bitterness has been cancelled. Bless the Lord and be happy!»

He then turns round and says: «You with torches, come forward and see what the Lord can do for those who deserve it.»

He lowers His arms, as open and covered by the mantle they prevented people from seeing the leper, and He moves aside.

The first cry is from the old man kneeling behind Jesus: «Son! Son! You are as handsome as when you were twenty years old. And just as healthy! Handsome, oh! you are more handsome now!... Oh! a board, a branch, something, that I may come to you!» and he is on the point of rushing forward. But Jesus holds him back: «No! Joy must not make you infringe the Law. He is to be purified first. Look at him! Kiss him with your eyes and with your heart, but be strong now as you have been for so many years. And be happy...»

In fact this is a complete miracle. It not only cured, but it restored what had been destroyed by disease, and the man, about forty years old, is as whole as if he had not suffered from any disease; he is only very thin, which gives him an ascetic fineness, which is not common but supernatural. He waves his hands, kneels down and blesses... he does not know what to do to tell Jesus that he thanks Him. At last he sees some flowers among the grass, he picks them, kisses them and throws them beyond the crevice at the Saviour's feet.

«Let us go! You people of Engedi, stay here with your head of the synagogue. We will go on towards Masada.»

«But you don't know... You cannot see...»

«I know the way. I know everything! Both the ways of the Earth and those of hearts, along which God and the Enemy of God pass, and I see those who accept the latter or the Former. Remain here with My peace! In any case it will soon be daybreak and with the burning branches we shall have light till dawn. Abraham, come here, that I may kiss you goodbye. May the Lord always be with you, as He has been so far, and with your family and your kind town.»

«Will you not come back to us again, Lord? To see my happy home?»

«No. My road is about to come to its end. But you will be in Heaven with Me, and your dear ones will be with you. Love me and bring the little ones up in the faith of the Christ... Goodbye to everybody. Peace and blessings to all those who are here and to their families. Peace to you, Elisha. Be perfect out of gratitude to the Lord. My apostles, come with Me...»

And He sets off at the head of the little procession, walking with burning branches held aloft. He turns round a projecting rock and disappears with His white mantle; then the apostles disappear one by one, the shuffling of their feet fades away, the reddish light of the branches vanishes...

Father and son remain on the tableland, sitting on the edges of the crevice, contemplating each other... Behind them, in a group, whispering their admiration, the people of Engedi... They await dawn to go back to the town with the news of the wonderful cure.

391. At Masada.

25th February 1946.

They are climbing up a very steep hill towards a town, which looks like an eagle's nest on an Alpine crest. They are proceeding with great difficulty, going eastwards and leaving behind a continuous chain of mountains, which are part of the Judaeian range and which, like the buttress of a huge wall, extend towards the southern end of the Dead Sea. The crest on which the town is built, is very high, solitary and steep, such as eagles are fond of for their regal lovemaking, as they disdain witnesses and community.

«What a road, my Lord!» moans Peter. «It is even worse than the road to

Jiphthahel» confirms Matthew.

«But it is not raining here, it is not damp and the road is not slippery. And that is not so bad» remarks Judas Thaddeus.

«Yes. That is a consolation But it is the only one. Don't worry! Your enemies will not capture you! If an earthquake does not demolish you, no deed of man will ever destroy you» says Peter addressing the town-fortress, enclosed in the narrow circle of its defences, with its houses crowded one against the other, like the seeds of pomegranates in their tough rind.

«Do you think so, Peter?» asks Jesus.

«Do I think so? I see it. Which is better!»

Jesus shakes His head but does not reply.

«Perhaps it would have been better if we had come along the sea. If Simon were here... he is familiar with this area» says Bartholomew sighing, as he is exhausted.

«When we are in town and you see the other road, you will thank Me for choosing this one. A man can climb up here, although with some difficulty. A goat can hardly climb up the other one» replies Jesus.

«How do You know? Did anybody tell You, or... ?»

«I know. In any case Ananias' daughter-in-law lives here. I want to speak to her, as first thing.»

«Master... will there be no danger up there?... Because we cannot get out in a hurry here, and if they should chase us we will never see our homes again. Look at those fearful precipices! And the sharp rocks!...» says Thomas.

«Be not afraid. We shall not find another Engedi. Only few towns are like Engedi in Israel. But no harm will befall us.»

«It's because... Do You know that it is one of Herod's strongholds?...»

«So? Be not afraid, Tom! Until it is the hour, nothing serious will happen.»

They proceed and they arrive at the not very attractive walls, when the sun is already high. But the height moderates the heat.

They go into the town through the arch of a narrow gloomy gate. The bastion

walls are huge, with frequent towers and narrow crenels.

«What a trap for game!» says Matthew.

«I am thinking of the poor wretches who had to carry all the materials up here, those blocks, these iron plates...» says James of Alphaeus.

«The holy love for their fatherland and independence made the weights light for the men of Jonathan Maccabee. Wicked selfishness and the fear of the people's wrath imposed a heavy yoke, not on subjects, but on people worse than slaves, by the will of Herod the Great. It was baptised in blood and tears, it will perish in blood and tears, when the hour of divine punishment comes.»

«Master, but what have the inhabitants got to do with it?»

«Nothing. And everything. *Because when subjects vie with their leaders in faults or in merits, they receive the same prize or punishment as their leaders.* But here is the house, the third one in the second street, with the well in front of it. Let us go...»

Jesus knocks at the door of a high narrow house. A boy opens the door.

«Are you a relative of Ananias'?»

«I am called after him, because he is the father of my father.»

«Call your mother. Tell her that I have come from the town where Ananias lives and where is the tomb of her dead husband.»

The boy goes away and comes back. «She said that she does not care to have any news of the old man. That You can go.»

Jesus' countenance becomes very severe. «I will not go away unless I speak to her. Child, go and tell her that Jesus of Nazareth, in Whom her husband believed, is here and wishes to speak to her. Tell her not to be afraid. The old man is not here...»

The boy goes away again. The wait is long. People have stopped to watch and some of them ask the apostles questions. But the atmosphere is unpleasant or indifferent or ironical... The apostles try to be kind, but it is obvious that they are frightened. And they become more so when the notables of the town arrive with some soldiers. Both the former and the latter look like... real jail-birds and neither inspire confidence.

Jesus, engrossed in thought, waits patiently, leaning against the doorpost, with folded arms.

The woman comes at last. She is tall and swarthy, her eyes are hard and her profile sharp. She is neither ugly nor old, but her countenance makes her look old and ugly. «What do You want? Hurry up, because I am busy» she says haughtily.

«I do not want anything. You may be sure. I am only bringing you Ananias' forgiveness, his love and prayers...»

«I will not have him again with me! It's no good begging of me. I don't want old mournful people. It's all over with him. In any case I am getting married again and I cannot impose a coarse peasant like him on the house of a rich man. I have suffered enough through my mistake in marrying his son! But I was a silly girl then and I was only looking at the handsomeness of the man. Woe is me! Woe is me! Cursed be whatever brought him my way! Let even his memory be anathema...» she shouts looking really wild.

«That is enough! Respect the living and the dead whom you did not deserve to have; your heart, woman, is harder than a stone. Woe to you! Yes. Woe to you! Because there is no love for your neighbour in your heart, and consequently Satan is in you. But watch, woman. Watch, lest the tears of the old man and those of your husband, whom you certainly oppressed through your lack of love, should become fire raining on what is dear to you. You have children, woman!...»

«Children! I wish I did not have them! Also the last tie would be broken! But I do not want to hear anything. I do not want to hear You. Go away! I am in my house, in my brother's house. I don't know You. I don't want to remember the old man. I don't...» she shouts like a magpie plucked alive. She is a real harpy.

«Be careful» says Jesus.

«Are You threatening me?»

«I am calling you back to God, to His Law, as I feel sorry for your soul. How can you bring your children up, if you have such feelings? Are you not afraid of the judgement of God?»

«Oh! That's enough. Saul, go and call my brother and tell him to come here with Jonathan. I will show You! I...»

«Oh! no. It is not necessary. God will not compel your soul. Goodbye.» And Jesus goes away elbowing His way through the crowd. The road is narrow, between high houses. The defence centre of the fortress town is in the eastern side, where everything falls sheer for hundreds of metres and where a narrow winding path, strikingly steep, climbs up to the top of the peak, from the plain and from the sea-shore. Jesus goes just there, where there is an emplacement for engines of war, and He begins to speak, repeating once again His invitation to the Kingdom of Heaven, of which He describes the main features.

And He is about to elucidate them, when some notables come forward, forcing their way through the crowd and shouting to one another. As soon as they are before Jesus, they enjoin: «Go away! We are quite enough here to educate the children of Israel», but they say so rather confusedly, as they all speak at the same time and seem to agree only to drive away Jesus.

«Go away! Our women need not be reproached by You, a Galilean!»

«Go away, offender! How dare You offend the woman of a Herodian, in one of the favourite towns of the great Herod? Usurper, since Your birth, of his sovereign rights! Away from here!»

Jesus looks at them, at the last ones in particular, and He says one word only: «Hypocrites!»

«Go away! Away!»

There is a real uproar of discordant voices, each accusing or defending his own caste. It is impossible to understand anything.

In the small square women shout and faint, children cry, soldiers try to make their way coming out from the fortress, and in doing so they hurt the people crushed in the square, who react cursing Herod and his soldiers, the Messiah and His followers. A real hubbub! The apostles, pressing round Jesus, are the only ones who defend Him more or less bravely and they also shout biting insults, and being sailors they are not in any way short of suitable vocabulary!

Jesus calls them saying: «Let us get out of here. We will go round the back of the town and will go away...»

«And for good, mind You!» shouts Peter, whose face is purple with anger.

«Yes, for good...»

They file off one after the other, and notwithstanding the pressure put on Him by the apostles, Jesus is the last. The guards, although they jeer at the «mocked prophet», as they say, playing all sorts of tricks on Him, have enough common sense to make haste and close the gate and lean against it, with their weapons turned towards the square.

Jesus takes a very narrow path along the walls, a tiny path about two palms wide, below which there is the void and death. The apostles follow Him avoiding looking down at the frightening abyss. They are now near the gate through which they entered the town. Jesus proceeds downhill, without stopping. The gate is closed also on this side of the town...

When they are at some distance from the town Jesus stops and lays His hand on the shoulder of Peter, who says wiping his perspiration: «We had a narrow escape! Cursed town! And cursed woman! Oh! poor Ananias! That woman is worse than my mother-in-law! What a viper!»

«Yes. She has the cold heart of a snake... Simon of Jonah, well, what do you think? Notwithstanding all its defences, do you think that this town is safe?»

«No, Lord! It does not have God in it. I say that it will be doomed with Sodom and Gomorrah.»

«You are right, Simon of Jonah! It is attracting upon itself the thunderbolts of divine wrath, not so much because it expelled Me, but because all the commandments of the Decalogue are infringed in it. Let us go now. A cave will receive us in its cool shade, during the hot hours. And at sunset we will go towards Kerioth, as far as moonlight will allow us...»

«My Master!» moans John bursting suddenly into tears.

«What is the matter with you?» they all ask him.

John does not reply. He is weeping covering his face with his hands, with his head lowered... He looks like the distressed John of Good Friday...

«Do not weep! Come here... There are still pleasant hours ahead of us» says Jesus drawing him to Himself. But what comforts the heart, increases also tears.

«Oh! Master! My Master! What shall I do? What shall I do?»

«For what, brother?», «For what, dear friend?» ask James and the others.

John has difficulty in speaking, then raising his face and throwing his arms

round Jesus' neck, thus compelling Him to bend over his distressed face, he shouts and replies to Jesus instead of those who had asked him the question: «Seeing You dying!»

«God will help you, His beloved child! You will not be without His help. Do not weep any more. Let us go!...» and Jesus walks away holding by the hand the apostle blinded by tears...

392. At the Country House of Mary Mother of Judas.

26th February 1946.

They arrive at Judas' country house on a wonderful cool morning. The orchards are wet with dew and the grass beneath the trees is a flowery carpet over which bees are buzzing. The windows of the house are already open. The woman who manages it, a strong woman who moderates her command with great kindness, is giving orders to the servants and peasants and is herself handing out the food to each of them before sending them to their work. Through the large wide open door of the kitchen she can be seen passing backwards and forwards in her dark dress, speaking to this one and that one, and making portions according to the needs of each worker. A flock of doves are cooing before the door, waiting to have their share.

Jesus proceeds smiling and He is almost at the door, when Mary of Simon looks out, with a little bag of corn in her hand, saying: «It's your turn now, my doves. Here is your first meal, then go away happily, in the sunshine, praising the Lord. Be good, be good! There is enough for everyone and there is no need for you to peck one another...» And she scatters the corn in all directions to avoid violent brawls among the greedy doves. She does not see Jesus, because she has stooped to caress also some of the birds, which are pecking her toes out of affection. Mary takes one in her hands and caresses it. She then puts it down, and sighs.

Jesus takes a step forward saying: «Peace to you, Mary, and to your house!»

«The Master!» exclaims the woman, dropping the little bag she was holding under her arm, and she runs towards Jesus, putting the doves to flight, but they immediately alight on the ground and busy themselves pecking the string of the

little bag and the bag itself to loosen and open it and thus satisfy their greed.

«Oh! Lord! What a holy and happy day!» and she is about to kneel to kiss Jesus' feet.

But He stops her saying: «The mothers of My apostles and the Holy women of Israel must not lower themselves like slaves in My presence. They have given Me their faithful souls and their sons. I give them love of predilection.»

Judas' mother deeply moved kisses His hands whispering: «Thank You, Lord!» She then raises her head and sees the group of the apostles, who have stopped at the nearest trees, and as she is surprised that her son is not coming to meet her, she looks at them more closely. She turns pale with fear. She almost shouts asking: «My son, where is he?» and she looks at Jesus trembling with fright.

«Be not afraid, Mary. I have sent him with Simon Zealot to Lazarus' house on a mission. If I could have stopped at Masada as long as I had decided, I would have found him here. But I could not stop there. The hostile town rejected Me. And I came here at once to find comfort in a mother and to give her the pleasure of learning that her son is serving the Lord» says Jesus laying stress on the last words, to make them more impressive.

Mary resembles a withered flower that revives. Colour comes back to her cheeks and light to her eyes. She asks: «Really, Lord? Is he good? Are You happy with him? You are? Oh! what joy! Joy of his mother's heart! I have prayed so much! So hard! I gave so many alms! And I did so much penance... so much... And what would I not do to make my son holy? Thanks, my Lord! Thanks for loving him so much. Because it is Your love that saves my Judas...»

«Yes. It is “our” love that... supports him...»

«Our love! How kind You are, Lord! You put my poor love close, nay united to Your divine love!... Oh! what words You have told me! How much certainty, how much comfort and peace You are giving me! If it were only my poor love, Judas would not profit much by it. But You, with Your forgiveness... because You are aware of his faults, You... with Your infinite love, which seems to grow the more he needs it after committing an offence, oh! You... my Judas will be able to control himself, at last, and forever. Is that right, Master?» The woman stares at Him with her deep serious eyes, her hands joined in prayer.

Jesus... oh! Jesus Who cannot reply «yes» but does not wish to deprive her of this hour of peace, finds words, which are neither a lie nor a promise, but which

the woman can accept with relief. He says: «His good will joined to our love can work real miracles, Mary. Let peace prevail in your heart always thinking that God loves you so much. He understands you. And He will be your friend forever.»

Mary kisses His hands once again to thank Him. She then says: «Come, then, into my house, awaiting Judas. Love and peace are here, blessed Master.»

And Jesus calls His apostles and enters the house to take some refreshment and to rest.

It is evening. Night falls slowly in the country. Noises cease one after the other and only a light breeze can be heard among the leaves: there is deep silence. Then there is the first cricket in the field full of ripe crops. Then another one... and another... And the whole country chirrs in the monotonous sound... until a nightingale utters its first canorous question to the stars... it becomes silent, then resumes singing. It is silent once again... What is it awaiting? Perhaps the first ray of the moon?... It is now whispering in a low voice, it must have flown to the thick walnut-tree near the house, where perhaps is its nest. It seems to be chattering to its mate that is perhaps brooding... Insistent bleating in the distance. The sound of harness-bells on the Kerioth road. Then silence.

Jesus is sat near Mary on the benches in front of the house. He is resting peacefully among His disciples and the servants of the house. The atmosphere is pleasant and peaceful, relieving both bodies and spirits. Jesus is not talkative, He speaks now and again. He lets the apostles speak of Engedi, of the old head of the synagogue, of the miracle. Mary and the servants are listening diligently.

Something moves near the apple-trees. But whilst here, in the open space before the house, one can see faintly, because it is a clear starry evening, there is no light under the thick trees and one can hear only the noise of something moving.

«A night animal? A lost sheep?» asks several of the apostles. And the mention of a sheep reminds many of the sheep lamenting because they had taken her lamb to kill it.

«That poor sheep cannot resign herself!» says the farmer. «I am afraid her udders will harden. She has not eaten anything all day and she does nothing but bleat... Listen to her!...»

«She'll get over it... They lamb so that we can eat their lambs» says a servant

philosophically.

«But they are not all alike. This one is not so stupid and suffers more. Listen! Doesn't it sound like weeping? Don't say that I am silly, Master... It affects me like the weeping of a woman for her lost child...»

«Instead, mother, you have found your child!» says Judas of Kerieth appearing behind them with Simon and making everybody start with surprise. «Master! Bless our return as You blessed our departure.»

«Yes, Judas» and Jesus embraces them both. «And you, too, mother...» Mary also kisses and embraces her son.

«We were not expecting to find you here, Master. We walked untiringly, taking short cuts most of the time to avoid being held back. But we met some disciples and we informed Johanna and Eliza that we shall soon be calling on them» explains Simon.

«Yes. And Simon walked as fast as a young man. Master, we gave the message. Lazarus is very ill. And the heat increases his suffering. He implores You to go to him soon... Master, with the exception of the Antonia, where I went to please Eglah who wanted to thank Claudia before leaving for Jericho, I did not go anywhere else. Is that right, Simon?»

«Yes, that is true. And we went to the Antonia at the sixth hour, on a sultry day, when it was wise to stay at home. While Judas was speaking to Claudia, whom Albula Domitilla had called into the garden, I was asked questions by the other women. I do not think I did the wrong thing in explaining, as best I could, what they wanted to know.»

«You did the right thing. They are really anxious to know the truth.»

«And Claudia is really willing to help You. She dismissed Eglah, who went to greet Plautina and the other women, and she asked me many questions. If I understood her properly she wants to persuade Pontius not to believe the slander of Pharisees, Sadducees and so on. Pontius trusts his centurions only to a certain extent, as they are good warriors but not such good messengers. And he often makes use of his wife, who must be very intelligent and shrewd, to have precise information. Claudia is really the true Proconsul. He must be a nonentity and keeps his position only because she is so powerful and advises him. They gave us some money for Your poor. Here it is.»

«When did you arrive? Are you not tired and dusty?» asks James of Zebedee.

«Between the third and the sixth hour. We went to Kerieth to see whether my mother was there and inform her of your arrival. But I behaved as You wish, Master. I did not give in to human desires. Is that true, Simon?»

«Yes, it is true.»

«Very well. Be always obedient and you will be saved.»

«Yes, Master. Oh! now that I know that Claudia is with us, I will no longer be led by my foolish haste. But it was all for the sake of love. You must agree. Disorderly love... because it felt as if it were not protected, as if it had no help to reach its purpose, which is to have You loved, respected as You deserve, and as it must be. Now I am calmer. I am no longer afraid. And it is pleasant also to wait...» says Judas day-dreaming.

«Do not give free course to dreams, Judas. Follow the truth. I am the Light of the world and light will always be disliked by darkness...» warns Jesus.

The moon has risen. In its white light the country shines, faces look pale, houses and trees are like silver. The eastern side of the walnut tree is fully lit. The nightingale accepts the lunar invitation and begins its long melodious song, which it had kept in reserve, to greet the moon and night.

393. Farewell to Kerieth. Parable of the Two Wills.

27th February 1946.

Jesus is speaking in the synagogue of Kerieth, which is incredibly crowded. He is replying to several people who have asked Him private advice, and is speaking to each separately. When He has satisfied them all, He begins to speak in a loud voice.

«People of Kerieth, listen to My farewell parable. We shall call it: “The Two Wills”.

A perfect father had two sons. He loved both with the same wise love, he directed both towards the right ways. Although there was no difference in the

way he loved and taught them, there was a remarkable difference in the two sons. One, the first-born, was humble, obedient; he did his father's will without discussion, he was always joyful and happy in his work. The other one, although younger, was often unhappy, he argued with his father and within himself. He always pondered, with deep human meditation, on the advice and orders that he received. And instead of carrying them out exactly as they were given, he took the liberty of modifying them completely or partially, as if they had been imparted by a fool. His elder brother used to say to him: "Don't do that. You are grieving our father!" But he would reply: "You are foolish. A great big strapping man such as you are, first-born over and above, and grown up, oh! I would not remain in the place where father put you. I would like to do more. I would impose myself on the servants, so that they might realise that I am the master. Owing to your perpetual meekness you look like a servant yourself. Can't you see that no one pays attention to you, notwithstanding your primogeniture? Some even laugh at you... The second-born son, tempted by Satan, or rather, a disciple of Satan, whose advice he carried out diligently, tempted his brother. But the latter, faithful to the Lord and respecting His Law, was faithful also to his father, whom he honoured with his perfect behaviour.

Years went by and the younger brother, annoyed at not being in a position to rule, after imploring his father several times saying: "Authorise me to act in your name, for your own honour, instead of letting that fool do so, as he is meeker than a lamb", and after trying to urge his brother to do more than the father ordered, to impose himself on the servants, on fellow-citizens and neighbours, said to himself: "Oh! that's enough! Our good name is at stake! Since no one wants to do it, I will do it myself". And he began to do things his own way, yielding to pride and falsehood and disobeying without the slightest hesitation. His father used to say to him: "Son, listen to your brother. He knows what he does." Or he would say: "I have been told that you have done such a thing. Is it true?" And the younger son, shrugging his shoulders would reply to his father's questions: "He knows, he knows! He is too shy and irresolute. He misses the opportunity to take command." Or he would reply: "I did not do such a thing." His father used to say to him: "Don't seek help from this one or that one. Who do you think can help more than we can, to give fame to our name? False friends influence you so that later they may laugh at you behind your back." But the second-born son replied: "Are you jealous because I am the one with spirit of enterprise? In any case I know that I am doing the right thing."

Time passed. The elder brother was growing more and more in justice, whilst

the younger one fostered evil passions. At last the father said: "It's time to put an end to this. You either comply with what I order, or you will lose my love." And the rebel went and told his false friends. "Are you worried about that? Don't! There is a way to make it impossible for a father to prefer one son to another. Hand him over to us and we will see to it. You will be free from material blame and your property will flourish because, after removing him who is too good, you will be able to make it famous. Do you not know that forcible action, although painful, is better than inertness, which is harmful to property?" they replied. And the younger son, by now sated with wickedness, gave assent to the conspiracy.

Now tell Me. Can the father be blamed for educating his sons in two different ways? Can we say that he was an accomplice? No, we cannot. Why, then, was one son a saint, and the other, wicked? Is the will of man perhaps given in advance in two different manners? No, it is not. It is given in one way only. But man is free to change it, and he who is good makes his will good, and who is wicked makes it wicked.

I exhort you, people of Kerieth – and this is the last time that I exhort you to follow the ways of wisdom – I exhort you to follow only your good will. Almost at the end of My ministry I repeat to you the words that were sung at My birth: "There is peace for men of good will." *Peace!* That is, *success, victory on the Earth and in Heaven, because God is with those who are willing to obey Him. God does not look so much at the high-sounding deeds that man does on his own initiative, as at the humble, prompt, faithful obedience to the work which He proposes.*

I would remind you of two episodes in the history of Israel, which prove that God is not with the man who wishes to act by himself, trampling on the order received.

Let us see the Maccabees. It is written that while Judas Maccabee was going with Jonathan to fight in Gilead and Simon was going to relieve his countrymen in Galilee, Joseph of Zechariah and the people's leader Azariah were ordered to remain in Judaea to guard it. And Judas said to them: "Take care of this people and do not engage the pagans until we return." But Joseph and Azariah, upon hearing of the great exploits of the Maccabees, wanted to do the same, and said: "Let us make a name for ourselves and go and fight the nations around us." But they were defeated and routed and "so the people met with a great reverse, because they had not listened to Judas and his brothers, but had relied on their

own prowess.” Pride and disobedience.

And what do we read in the Book of the Kings? We read that Saul was reprovved a first time and the second he was reprovved so much for his disobedience, that David was elected in his place. Because he had disobeyed! Remember! “Does the Lord perhaps want holocausts and victims or does He not prefer people to obey His voice? *Obedience is worth more than sacrifices, and to listen is worth more than offering the fat of rams; because rebellion is a sin of sorcery, presumption a crime of idolatry.* Now, since you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has rejected you as king.”

Remember! When Samuel obediently filled his horn with oil and went to Jesse of Bethlehem, because the Lord had chosen Himself another king there, Jesse went to the banquet with his sons after the sacrifice and his sons were introduced to Samuel. Eliab, handsome, young and tall, was the first one. But the Lord said to Samuel: “Take no notice of his appearance or his height, because I have rejected him. I do not see as man sees. Because man looks at appearances, but the Lord looks at the heart.” And Samuel did not want Eliab as king. Abinadab was then presented to him. But Samuel said: “The Lord has not chosen this one either.” And Jesse presented Shammah to him. But Samuel said: “He is not the chosen one of the Lord either.” And he said the same with regard to all the seven sons of Jesse present at the banquet. And Samuel asked: “Are all your sons here?”

“No” replied Jesse. “There is still one left, the youngest, who is looking after the sheep.”

“Send for him, because we will not sit down to eat until he comes.” And David came. He was a fair-haired boy, of fresh complexion and pleasant bearing. And the Lord said: “Anoint him, for he is the king.” Because, and always bear this in mind, God chooses whoever He wants, and He deprives those who forfeit His favour by depraving His will through pride and disobedience.

I will not come back here again. The Master is about to fulfill His ministry. Afterwards, He will be more than Master. Prepare your souls for that hour, and remember that *as My birth was salvation for those who had good will, so My accession will be salvation for those who had good will in following Me, as Master, in My doctrine, and for those who will follow Me in it, also after My accession.*

Goodbye men, women and children of Keriioth! Goodbye. Let us look at one

another straight in the eyes! Let us make our hearts, yours and Mine, blend in a loving embrace of farewell, and may our love be always alive, also when I shall no longer be among you... The first time I came here, a just man breathed his last in the kiss of his Saviour, in a vision of glory... And now, the last time I have come here, I bless you with love...

Goodbye!... May the Lord grant you faith, hope and charity in perfect measure. May He give you love, love, love. For Himself, for Me, for the good, for the unhappy, for the guilty, for those who are burdened with the weight of a fault which is not theirs...

Remember. Be good. Do not be unjust. Remember that I have always forgiven not only guilty people, but I have embraced the whole of Israel with My love. The whole of Israel, which consists of good and not good people, as in every family there are good and not good members, and it would be unfair to say that a whole family is bad, only because one member is so.

I am going... If anyone still wishes to speak to Me, let him come before evening to the country house of Mary of Simon.»

Jesus raises His hand and blesses, and then goes out quickly through the back door followed by His apostles.

People whisper: «He is not coming back any more!», «What did He mean?», «Tears welled in His eyes when saying goodbye...», «Did you hear? He said that He will be raised!»

«So Judas is right! Of course, later, as king, He will not be among us as now...»

«But I spoke to His brothers. They say that He will not be king, as we imagine. But He will be the King of Redemption as the prophets say. He will be the Messiah, of course!»

«Not at all! The King Redeemer. The man of sorrows.»

«Yes.», «No»

... In the meantime Jesus is walking fast towards the country.

394. Anne of Kerioth. Farewell to Judas' Mother.**28th February 1946.**

«Lord, would You come with me, with me alone, to see an unhappy mother. I desire this more than anything else» says Mary of Simon, standing respectfully before Jesus, while after the midday meal, the apostles have scattered to rest before resuming their journey in the evening. Jesus instead is resting in the shade of the apple-trees laden with small green apples about to ripen and Mary seems to be resuming a conversation previously begun.

«Yes, woman. I also wish to be with you, all alone in these last hours, as I was the first time I came here. Let us go.» And they go into the house where Jesus takes His mantle and Mary her veil and mantle.

They follow paths through fields, orchards and forest trees. It is still warm. Waves of warm air come from the fields where the crops are ripe. But the mountain breeze moderates the heat which would have been unbearable down in the plain.

«I am sorry to make You walk in this heat. But later... it would no longer be possible. And I have always longed for this thing, without ever daring to ask You. A short while ago You said to me: “Mary, to show that I love you, as if you were My mother, I say to you: ask Me whatever you wish to have and I will satisfy you” and so I dared. Lord, do You know where we are going?»

«No, woman.»

«We are going to the house of the woman, who was to be Judas' mother-in-law... (Mary sighs heavily). She was to... She is not and never will be, because Judas left the girl who died of a broken heart... and her mother now bears me and my son ill-will. She always curses us... Judas is so... weak and inclined to Evil, that he needs blessings only!... I would like You to speak to her... You can convince her... and tell her that it was a mercy that the marriage did not take place... that it is no fault of mine... that she may die without any grudge; because she is dying slowly with such grief in her soul. I would like to be at peace with her... because I have suffered and I was ashamed of what happened and it grieves me to see that the person who has been my companion since I came here when I got married, is no longer my friend. In short, Lord, You know...»

«Yes, do not worry. Your request is an honest one and I will fulfill the task because it is a good thing.» After crossing a little valley, they climb up another

hill, on which there is a village.

«Anne has lived here since her daughter died. In her estate. Before she was at Kerioth. But while she lived there, her reproaches broke my heart every time we met.»

They take a side path just before the village and arrive at a low house, in the fields.

«Now! My heart is trembling, now that I am here! She will refuse to see me... she will reject me... she will be upset and her poor heart will suffer even more... Master...»

«Yes, I will go. You stay here, till I call you. And pray in order to assist Me.»

And Jesus goes, all alone, as far as the wide-open door of the house, which He enters greeting with His kind salutation.

A woman comes towards Him: «What do You want? Who are You?»

«I have come to bring relief to your mistress. Take Me to her.»

«Are You a doctor? It is of no avail! There is no hope. Her heart is dying.»

«There is still her soul to be saved. I am the Rabbi.»

«You are of no use even as such. She is displeased with the Eternal Father and does not want to listen to sermons. Leave her alone.»

«I have come just because she is in that frame of mind. Let me go in and she will not be so unhappy in her last days.»

The woman shrugs her shoulders and says: «Come in!»

There is a cool half-dark corridor with several doors. At the end of the corridor the last door is half-open and moaning can be heard from it. The woman enters the room saying: «My mistress, there is a rabbi who wants to speak to you.»

«Why?... To tell me that I am cursed? That I will have no peace not even in the next life?» says the sick woman panting and upset.

«No. To tell you that your peace will be complete, if you only wish so, and you will be happy forever with your Johanna» says Jesus appearing at the door.

The sick woman, whose face is yellow and swollen, and who is panting in her little bed, leaning on many pillows, looks at Him and says: «Oh! What words! It

is the first time that a rabbi does not reproach me... What hope!... My Johanna... with me... blessed... no more grief... the grief caused by a cursed man... she who gave birth to him did not avoid it... she betrayed me... after enticing me... My unhappy daughter...» she pants more and more.

«See? You are making her feel worse. I knew. Come away.»

«No. You go away. Leave me alone with her...» The woman goes out shaking her head.

Jesus approaches the bed slowly. He kindly wipes the perspiration on the face of the woman, who finds difficulty in doing so because her hands are incredibly swollen, and He fans her head with a fan made with palm leaves. He helps her to drink as she seeks some refreshment in the liquor on the night table. He seems a son near a diseased mother. He finally sits down, kindly but firmly determined to fulfill His mission.

The woman watches Him and calms down, and with an agonising smile she says: «You are handsome and kind. Who are You, Rabbi? You are as gentle as my beloved daughter was in comforting me.»

«I am Jesus of Nazareth!»

«You?!... And You have come to me?... Why?...»

«Because I love you. I have a mother, too, and in every mother I see Mine, and in the tears of mothers, I see My Mother's...»

«Why? Does Your Mother weep? Why? Has another son of Hers died?»

«Not yet... I am Her only Son and I am still alive. But She already weeps because She knows that I must die.»

«Oh! Poor woman! How dreadful to know beforehand that a son must die. But how does She know? You are healthy. You are strong. You are good. I deluded myself until she died, and she was so ill!... How can Your Mother know that You must die?»

«Because I am the Son of man, foretold by the prophets. I am the Man of sorrows seen by Isaiah, the Messiah sung by David and described as the tortured Redeemer. I am the Saviour, the Redeemer, woman. And death, a dreadful death is awaiting Me... and My Mother will be present... and My Mother has been aware, since I was born, that Her heart will be broken by sorrow like My own...»

Do not weep... Through My death I will open the gates of Heaven to your Johanna...»

«Also to me! To me!...»

«Yes. In due course. But first you must learn to love and forgive. To begin to love again. To be just. And to forgive... Otherwise you will not be able to go to Heaven, with Johanna, and with Me...»

The woman weeps uncontrollably. She moans: «To love... To love when men have taught us to hate... when God has ceased to love us having no mercy on us... it is difficult... How can we love, when men have tortured us, and our friends have hurt us and God has abandoned us?...»

«No. He has not abandoned you. I am here. To make heavenly promises to you. To assure you that your grief will turn into joy, if you so wish. Listen to Me, Anne... You are weeping because the marriage was cancelled, and that has become the cause of all your grief, and because of that you say that a man is a murderer and his poor mother an accomplice. Listen, Anne. In the next few months you will realise that it was a grace from Heaven that Johanna did not get married to Judas...»

«Don't mention his name to me!» shouts the woman.

«I am mentioning it, to tell you that you must thank the Lord and you will be thanking Him in a few months' time...»

«I will be dead...»

«No. You will be alive and you will remember Me, and you will understand that there are sorrows greater than yours...»

«Greater? It's not possible!»

«What about My Mother Who will see Me die on a cross?» Jesus has stood up. He is imposing. «And what about the grief of the mother of the betrayer of Jesus Christ, the Son of God? Think, woman, of that mother... You... The whole of Kerieth, the country around it and beyond it have sympathised with you in your grief! You have been as proud of it as of the crown of a martyr. But that mother! Like Cain, without being Cain, being instead Abel: victim of her traitorous son, the killer of God, a sacrilegious cursed son, she will not be able to stand the look of men, because each glance will be like a stone of lapidation, and in every word, in every voice of man, she will seem to be hearing a curse, an abuse and

she will never find shelter on the Earth until her death, until God, Who is just, takes the martyr with Himself making her forget that she is the mother of the murderer of God, by giving her the possession of God... Is that mother's sorrow not greater?»

«Oh! immense sorrow!...»

«You understand... Be good, Anne. Admit that God was good in what He did...»

«But my daughter is dead! Judas made her die, to have a richer dowry... His mother approved...»

«No. That is not true. I can assure you, and I read hearts. Judas is My apostle but I tell you – he behaved badly and will be punished for it. But his mother is innocent. She loves you, and would like to be loved by you... Anne, you are two unhappy mothers. But you are proud of your dead child, who was innocent and pure, celebrated and honoured by the world... Mary of Simon cannot be proud of her son. His conduct is reprov'd by men.»

«That is true. But if he had married Johanna, he would not be reprov'd.»

«But in a short time you would see Johanna die of a broken heart, because Judas will die a violent death.»

«What are You saying? Oh! poor Mary! When? How? Where?»

«Soon. And in a dreadful way... Anne! You are good! You are a mother! You are aware of the sorrow of a mother! Anne, become Mary's friend once again! Let sorrow join you as joy was to unite you. Let me go away happily, knowing that she will have a friend, one only, at least one»

«Lord... to love her... means to forgive her... It is very hard... I seem to be burying my daughter once again... to be killing her myself...»

«Such thoughts originate in Darkness! Do not listen to them. Listen to Me, the Light of the world. The Light of the world tells you that Johanna's destiny has been less bitter dying a virgin than dying the widow of Judas. Believe Me, Anne. And consider that Mary of Simon is more unhappy than you are...»

The woman is pensive, she struggles, weeps and says: «But I have cursed her, both her and the fruit of her womb! I have sinned...»

«And I absolve you. And the more you love her, the more you will be absolved in Heaven.»

«But if I become her friend... I will meet Judas. Lord, I cannot do that!...»

«You will never meet him again. I will never come back to Kerioth again, neither will Judas. We have already said goodbye to the people...»

«Oh! You said...»

«That I will not come back again. Judas said that he will not be able to come back until after My accession. But he believes he will be seeing Me ascending a throne. Instead death on a cross is waiting Me. And he thinks that he will become one of My ministers. Death instead is awaiting him. But You shall not tell anybody that. Never. His mother is not to know until everything has been accomplished. You said: "Poor woman! To know beforehand that her son must die." But if My Mother's suffering, also because of that, is already increasing the merits of My Sacrifice, silence is compassion for Mary of Simon. You shall not speak.»

«No, my Lord. I swear to it in the name of my Johanna.»

«I want another promise! A great, holy one! You are good. You already love Me...»

«Yes, so much. I have been at peace since You came here...»

«When Mary of Simon no longer has her son and the world insults her with sneering words, you, you only, will open your heart and your house to her. Will you promise Me? In the names of God and of Johanna. She would have done that, because Mary was still the mother of the man she still loved» insists Jesus.

«... Yes!» replies the woman shedding tears.

«May God bless you, woman, and give you peace... and good health. Come let us go and meet Mary, and give her the kiss of peace»

«But Lord I cannot walk. My legs are swollen and I cannot move them. See? I am here, all dressed, but I am just a trunk...»

«You were. Come!» and Jesus stretches out His hand invitingly.

The woman, staring at Jesus' eyes, moves her legs, she stretches them out of the little bed, lays her bare feet on the floor, stands up and walks... She seems fascinated. She is not even aware that she has already been cured... She goes out into the dim corridor, her hand still in Jesus'... She goes towards the door. She is almost there when she meets the servant seen previously, who utters a cry of

joyful fear... Other servants rush there, fearing she was dying, whereas they see that their mistress, who shortly before was about to breathe her last and hated Mary of Simon, is now walking fast with her arms stretched out, after leaving Jesus' hand, towards poor Mary, whom she calls and embraces to her heart, while they both weep...

... On their way back to the house, after the peaceful farewell, Mary of Simon thanks her Lord and asks: «When will You come back to do more good?»

«Never, woman. I have already told the citizens. But My heart will always be with you. Remember, always remember that I loved you and I love you. Remember that I know that you are good, and that is why God loves you. Always bear that in mind, also in the most dreadful hours. You must never think that God considers you guilty. In His eyes your soul appears and will always appear adorned with the gems of your virtues and the pearls of your suffering. Mary of Simon, mother of Judas, I want to bless you, I want to embrace you and kiss you so that your faithful sincere maternal kiss may compensate Me for any other one... and My kiss may make amends for all your sorrows. Come, mother of Judas. And thank you, thank you for all the love and honour you have given Me» and He embraces her and kisses her forehead, as He does with Mary of Alphaeus.

«But we will meet again! I will come at Passover...»

«No. Do not come. I beseech you. Do you want to make Me happy? Do not come. Women at next Passover... no!»

«But why?...»

«Because... there will be a frightful rising in Jerusalem next Passover. It is no place for women! Nay... Mary, I will order your relative to join you. You must stay together. You need him because... Judas from now on will not be able to assist you or to come...»

«I will do as You say... So never again I shall see Your face which reflects the peace of Heaven? How much peace You have infused from Your eyes into my sorrowful heart!...» says Mary weeping.

«Do not weep. Life is short. Later you will see me forever in My Kingdom.»

«So You think that your humble servant will enter it?...»

«I already see your seat among the martyrs and co-redeemers. Do not be afraid,

Mary. The Lord will be your eternal compensation. Let us go. Night is falling and it is time for Me to resume My journey...»

And they go back the same road through fields and orchards, towards the house, where the apostles are waiting.

Jesus bids goodbye hurriedly, blesses and sets out at the head of His apostles... While He goes away, Mary weeps, on her knees...

395. Farewell to Juttah.

5th March 1946.

Jesus is speaking to the people of Juttah on a quiet morning. Oh! one can really say that the whole of Juttah is at His feet. Little shepherds, who are generally scattered on the slopes of mountains are also there with their sheep, at the edge of the crowd. Also those who usually go elsewhere, to fields, woods, markets, are there. Decrepit old people are there, and close to Jesus there are smiling children, and young girls, and new brides, and women about to give birth to a child, and those giving their children suck are all there. The whole of Juttah.

The mountain spur projecting southwards is the amphitheatre where the tranquil people are gathered. Sitting on the grass or sitting astride a low dry-stone wall, with the wide horizon around, the boundless sky above, the torrent below, which shines and smiles in the morning sunshine, the beautiful green woody mountains rising all around, the people of Juttah are listening to the Master, Who is speaking, standing against a very tall walnut-tree, His white linen garment outstanding against the dark tree-trunk, smiling, His eyes sparkling with the joy of being loved, His hair lit up by the caresses of sunbeams from the east. In the respectful heedful silence broken only by the twittering of birds and the torrent gurgling below, His words descend slowly into hearts, and His perfect voice fills the quiet air with its harmony.

While I am writing, He is repeating once again that it is necessary to comply with the Decalogue, perfected by His doctrine of love in its application to hearts «to build in souls the abode where the Lord will dwell until those who have lived keeping the Law faithfully go to live in Him in the Kingdom of Heaven» He

says. And He goes on:

«Because it is so. *The inhabitation of God in men and of men in God is accomplished through obedience to His Law*, which begins with a precept of love and is all love from the first to the last precept of the Decalogue. That is the true abode that God wants and in which God dwells, and the reward in Heaven, achieved through obedience to the Law, is the true Home in which you will live with God forever. Because – remember Isaiah's 66th chapter – God does not dwell on the Earth, which is only a footstool for His immensity, and His throne is Heaven, which is too small, a mere nothing, to contain the Infinite, but *His abode is in the hearts of men*. Only the most perfect goodness of the Father of all love can grant His children to receive Him, and it is an infinite mystery, which becomes more and more perfect, that the One and Trine God, the most pure Triform Spirit may be in the hearts of men. Oh! Holy Father, when will You allow Me to make of these people who love You, not just a temple for Our Spirit, but, through Your perfection of love and forgiveness, a tabernacle, so that each faithful heart may become an ark, in which the true Bread of Heaven will dwell, as it did in the womb of the Blessed Mother amongst all women?

Oh! dearest disciples of Juttah who were prepared for Me by a just soul, bear in mind the Prophet and what he says, as it is the Lord Who speaks, addressing those who build empty temples of stone, in which there is no justice or love, and they cannot build in themselves the throne of their Lord by obeying His commands. The Prophet says: “What house will you build Me, what place could you make for My rest?” And He means: “Do you think that you can possess Me just because you build poor walls for Me? Do you think that you give Me joy by means of your false practices, which are not supported by a holy life?” No. God cannot be possessed through vain appearances that conceal sores and emptiness, like a golden mantle thrown on a leper or on a clay statue, which is empty inside, without the life of the soul. And the Lord, the Master of the world, confessing that He is a poor King with too few subjects and a poor Father of too many children who have run away from His residence, says: “To whom shall I turn My eyes, if not to the man of humbled and contrite spirit, who trembles at My word?” Why does he tremble? Only with fear of God? No. With deep respect and true love. *Because he is a humble subject and son, who says and acknowledges that the Lord is Everything while he is nothing, and he trembles with emotion feeling that he is loved, forgiven and supported by the Lord Who is Everything.*

Oh! do not look for God among proud people! He is not there. Do not look for Him among hard-hearted people. He is not there. Do not look for Him among unrepentant souls. He is not there. *He is with the simple, the pure, the merciful, the poor in spirit, the meek people, with those who weep without cursing, with those who seek justice, with those who are persecuted, with peaceful souls. God is there. He is in those who repent and desire forgiveness and seek expiation.* And none of these offer the sacrifice of a bull or a sheep or any other oblation, to be praised or from superstitious terror of punishment or motives of pride, that they might appear perfect. *But they offer the sacrifice of their contrite and humbled hearts, if they are sinners; of their hearts obedient to the point of heroism, if they are just.* That is what the Lord likes. *Those are the offerings for which He grants Himself with His ineffable treasures of love and supernatural delights.* He does not give Himself to the others. They already have their poor trite delights, and it is useless for God to call them to His ways, because they have already chosen their own. He will let them have nothing but neglect, fear and punishment, because they have not replied to the Lord, they have not obeyed, they have done evil in the eyes of God contemptuously and wickedly.

But you, beloved people of Juttah, who tremble with love in the knowledge of God, will be happy, whilst the others will be put to shame. Because you have been sneered at like fools by the mighty ones, and notwithstanding their mockery you have persisted in loving Me. Because you have been rejected because of My Name, and you will be rejected even more in future, nay, you will be disowned as outcasts of Israel, unacceptable to God, whereas the scion of eternal Life is grafted into you and into people like you, the scion of Him Who is rooted in the Father, and you are therefore part of God, living on His sap. And yet people would like to convince you that you are in error and in your eyes, simple but enlightened by Grace, they would like to justify themselves in order not to appear impious and evil-doers. Because it was said to you: “Let the Lord show His glory and we shall acknowledge Him as joyfully as you do.” They will be confused.

Oh! I can already hear the vipers say, after the tumult in which they will be crushed without becoming any better, and they will cease being harmful only when their execrable heads are trodden on, and they will bite and kill even when they are broken into two and only their heads emerge after an overwhelming manifestation of God, I can already hear them shout: “How can the Lord have given birth to his new people all of a sudden, if we, who have been so long in His womb, are not yet born to Light? Can a woman be delivered of a child

before filling the house with the cries of throes? Can the Lord have given birth before His time was due? Can the Earth give birth in one day and can the people of a country be born all together?"

This is My reply and remember it to give it to those who will persecute you scoffing at you: "Those who are dead fruit in the womb of God could never have been born to Light, because they became detached from the matrix and thus dried up remaining inert like something evil concealed in the womb, instead of being developing embryos. And to eject the dead seed from His womb and have children, so that His Name might not die on the Earth, God became prolific of new children, marked with His Tau and secretly and silently, so that Satan and his followers serving Lucifer could not be harmful, He gave birth to His Son before time, due to passionate love, and at the same time He gives birth to His new people, because the Lord can do everything." Oh! He puts these words into the mouth of the prophet Isaiah: "Shall I not be able to bring forth, I who make other people give birth? Shall I be sterile, I who make other people prolific?"

Rejoice with the Jerusalem of Heaven, be glad with her, all you who love the Lord! Rejoice with her, you who are waiting, hoping and suffering!

Oh! Come back to Me, words! Words spoken by the Word of God. Words spoken by the mouthpiece of God: Isaiah, His prophet. Come back to the Source, o eternal words, to be spread on this flower-bed of God, on this flock, on this offspring! Oh! Come! This is one of the hours and of the meetings for which you were given, o prophetic words, sounds of love and voices of truth! Here they are! They are coming back to Him Who inspired them! I now repeat them, in the name of the Father, of My Being, and of the Spirit, to these people beloved by God, chosen among the flock of God, which was to consist entirely of lambs, and became corrupted with rams and even with more unclean animals. You will be suckled and filled from the breast of Divine Consolation and you will savour with delight the multifarious glory of God.

The Lord says to you: I will send towards you flowing peace, like a river, and like a stream in spate, a greater glory than that of the nations. The glory of Heaven will flood you. You will suck it, carried at His breast and you will be fondled in His lap. Yes, as a mother caresses her child, as I am fondling this little boy, whom I gave My name (and Jesus takes little Jesai from the arms of his mother, who is almost at His feet with her three children), so I will console you who love Me and will continue to love Me and you will soon be comforted forever in My Kingdom. You will see it and your hearts will be delighted, and

your bones will revive like fresh grass, you who are free from fear because you are faithful to Me, when the Lord comes in a coach of fire like a whirlwind to lead souls in the fire of love and justice, to punish or to praise, separating lambs from wolves, that is, from those who thought that they were sanctifying themselves and becoming pure, whereas they were becoming idolaters.

The Lord, Who is now departing, will come back and blessed are those whom He will find persevering until the end. This is My farewell and My blessing. Kneel down that I may fortify you by it. May the Lord bless you and protect you. May He show His face to you and have mercy on you. May the Lord give you His peace. Go! Allow Me to take leave of the good people among the good inhabitants of Juttah.»

The people go away reluctantly. But when a boy is the first to say: «Lord, allow me to kiss Your hand», and Jesus agrees, everybody wishes to kiss the holy body of the Lamb of God, and those who had already gone away towards the village, come back, and children kiss His cheeks, old people His hands, and women his bare feet on the grass, weeping and uttering words of farewell and blessings.

Jesus receives them patiently and bids each of them goodbye.

At last they have all been satisfied... Only the hospitable family is left... And they gather round Jesus. And Sarah says: «Will You really not come back again?»

«No, woman. Never again. But we shall not be separated. My love will always be with you and your family, and yours with Me. You will not forget Me, I know. But I say to you: even in the most dreadful hours which are to come, do not welcome Falsehood, not even as a guest passing through or a sudden invader... Give me the baby, Sarah.»

The woman hands Jesai to Him and Jesus sits on the grass with the child in His lap and He speaks with His face bent over the head of the little boy: «Always remember that I am the Lamb, Whom Isaac taught you to love even before you became acquainted with Me. And that a lamb is always innocent, like this child, even if they envelop it in the skin of a wolf to make it look like an evildoer. Remember that I am even more innocent than this baby... who, fortunate fellow! because of his innocence and age will not be able to understand the slander of men about his Lord and, therefore, will not be upset by it... and he will continue to love Me thus... as now... Have hearts like his, for the Lamb, the Friend, the

Innocent One, the Saviour, Who loves you and blesses you in a very special manner. Goodbye, Mary! Come and give Me a kiss... Goodbye, Immanuel! Come here as well... Goodbye, Jesai, little lamb of the Lamb... Be good... Love Me...»

«Are You weeping, Lord!?» asks the little girl who is surprised seeing a tear shine on Jesai's hair.

«Is He weeping?» asks Sarah's husband.

«Are You weeping, Master! Why?» asks the woman.

«Do not grieve at My tears. They are love and blessing... Goodbye, Sarah. Goodbye, man. Come, like the others, to kiss your departing Friend...» and after the two have kissed His hands, He puts the baby in his mother's arms, He blesses once again and then He quickly begins to descend the same road by which He came up.

He is followed by the farewell greetings of those who remained: by the deep voice of the man, the moved one of the woman, the trilling cries of the children, down to the foot of the hill. Then only the torrent, which He walks upstream northwards, greets the Master, Who leaves the land of Juttah for good.

396. Farewell to Hebron.

7th March 1946.

And here is Hebron in the middle of mountains covered with forests and meadows. On entering the town Jesus is greeted with cries of hosanna by the first people who see Him, some of whom run away to give the news to the whole village. The head of the synagogue, those who were miraculously cured the previous year and the notables, all rush towards Him. Everyone wishes to have the Lord as his guest.

But Jesus, thanking them all, says: «I am only stopping long enough to speak to you... So let us go to the poor holy house of the Baptist, so that I may pay My respects to it as well... It is the land of miracles. You are not aware.»

«Oh! We are, Master. The people who were cured are among us!...» say many.

«Long before last year it was the land of miracles. The first time was thirty-three years ago, when the Grace of the Lord revived the withered womb to make it the tree that bore the sweet apple of My Precursor. And it was thirty-two years ago, when by mysterious deed, I presanctified him, while he and I were two fruits maturing in deep wombs. And then again, when I loosened the tongue of John's father. But a great miracle of two years ago, of which none of you is aware, is to be added to the secret deeds of the not yet born Incarnate. Do you remember the woman who lived in there?...»

«Who? Aglae?» ask many.

«Yes. I revived her, not her womb, but her soul withered by paganism and sin, and I made her prolific of justice, freeing her from her fetters, as I was assisted by her good will. And I propose her to you as a model. Do not be scandalised. I solemnly tell you that she is to be held up as an example to be imitated, because few people in Israel have gone as far as the heathen and sinner to reach the sources of God.»

«We thought that she had gone away with other lovers... Some people said that she had changed and had become good... But we said: "It's a whim of hers!" There were also some people who said that she had come to You... to sin...» explains the head of the synagogue.

«She did come to Me. But to be redeemed.»

«We committed a sin of rash judgement...»

«That is why I say: "Do not judge".»

«And where is she now?»

«God only knows. She is certainly doing severe penance. Pray to support her... I salute you, o holy house of My Relative and Precursor! Peace to you! Although you are now alone and desolate, may peace always be with you, o holy dwelling of peace and faith!» Jesus goes in, blessing the garden, which has become wild and He walks along what once were pergolas or tidy laurel or box espaliers and which are now ruffled clusters of plants oppressed by twining ivy, clematis and convolvuli. He goes to the end, where are the remains of the sepulchre, and stops there.

The people crowd round Him silently and orderly.

«Children of God, people of Hebron, listen! I have come to confirm and fortify

you in your faith, so that you may not be upset and deceived in judging your Saviour, as you were with regard to the woman who lived here in sin. I have come to give you the viaticum of My word, so that it may shine brightly in you in the hour of darkness and Satan may not make you lose the way to Heaven.

Before long your hearts will moan the words of the psalm of Asaph, the poet prophet, and you will say: “Why, o God, have You rejected us for good? Why are You raging at the flock You used to pasture?”, and then you will really be able to raise the already accomplished Redemption as a right of protection, and shout: “This is Your people whom You redeemed!” to implore protection against the enemies, who will have done all sorts of evil in the true Sanctuary where God is as in Heaven, in the Christ of the Lord. And after prostrating the Holy One, they will strive to demolish His wall: His believers. True desecrators and persecutors of God, worse than Nebuchadnezzar and Antiochus and all future persecutors, they are already raising their hands to knock Me down in their limitless pride, which does not want to be converted and does not want to have faith, charity, justice, and like yeast in a heap of flour, it swells and overflows from the Sanctuary, which has become the citadel of the enemies of God.

Children, listen! When they will persecute you for loving Me, fortify your hearts considering that I was persecuted before you. Remember that they already have in their throats howling cries of triumph, and they are preparing flags to wave them in the hour of victory, and on each flag there will be a lie against Me, and I shall seem the Defeated One, the Evil-Doer, the Cursed One.

Are you shaking your heads? Do you not believe Me? Your love is preventing you from believing... Love is a great thing! A great strength... and a great danger! Yes, danger. The impact of realities in the hour of darkness will be violent in a superhuman way in the hearts which love, not yet perfectly settled, blinds. You cannot believe that I, the King, the Powerful One, can be at the mercy of nonentities. Above all, you will not be able to believe it later, and the doubt will arise: “Was it really Him? And if it was, how could He be defeated?”

Strengthen your hearts for that hour! Remember that if “in a moment” the enemies of the Holy One have knocked the doors down, demolishing everything, and set the fire of hatred to the Word of God, if they have pulled down the Tabernacle of the Most Holy Name, saying in their hearts: “Let us stop all the feasts of God on the Earth”, because it is a feast to have God among you, and saying: “Let His insignia never be seen again, let there be no prophet who knows what we are”, He Who gave the sea its boundaries and crushed the filthy

heads of the sacred crocodiles and of their worshippers in the waters, He Who opened springs and torrents and dried up inexhaustible rivers, He Who is the master of day and night, of summer and springtime, of life and death, of everything, will make His Christ rise quickly, even more quickly, as it is written, and He will be King forever. And those who have been firm in their faith will reign with Him in Heaven.

Remember that. And when you see Me raised and scorned, do not vacillate. And when you will be raised and despised, do not vacillate.

Oh! Father! My Father! On behalf of these people, who are dear to You and to Me, I implore You. Hear Your Word, listen to the Propitiator! Do not leave to wild beasts the souls of those who praise You by loving Me, do not forget forever the souls of Your little children. Remember Your promises, o good God, because the dark places of the Earth are haunts of wickedness from which terror comes out to frighten Your little ones. Father! Oh! My Father! Do not let the humble who hope in You go away confused! Let the poor and the needy praise Your Name because of the assistance You will give them! Rise, o God! I implore You for that hour, for those hours! Rise, o God! For the sake of the sacrifice of John and of the holiness of Your patriarchs and prophets! For the sake of My sacrifice, o Father, defend this flock of Yours and Mine! Grant them light in darkness, faith and strength against seducers! Grant them Yourself, Father! Give them Us, now, tomorrow and always, until they enter Your Kingdom! Let Us be in their hearts until they will be forever and ever where We are. Amen.»

And since there are no miracles to be worked, Jesus walks through the almost ecstatic crowds blessing His listeners one by one. And He resumes His journey in the sun, which is already high but is made tolerable by leafy trees and the cool mountain air.

Behind Him, in a group, the apostles are talking. They are speaking eagerly to one another.

«What sermons! They make one shudder!» says Bartholomew.
 «But how sad they are! They make you weep!» says Andrew with a sigh.
 «Eh! It's His farewell. I am right. He is really moving towards His throne» exclaims Judas Iscariot.

«Throne! H'm! I think He refers to persecutions rather than honours!» remarks Peter.

«Not at all! The time of persecutions is over! Ah! I am happy!» shouts the Iscariot.

«You are lucky! I would like to be back in the days when we were not known, two years ago... or at the Clear Water... I tremble thinking of future days...» says John.

«Because you are faint-hearted... But I! I already see the future... Processions!... Singers!... People prostrated!... Homage by other countries!... Oh! It's time! Camels will really come from Midian and crowds from everywhere... and there will be a multitude... not just the three poor Wise Men... Israel as great as Rome... Greater than Rome... The glory of the Maccabees, of Solomon... all glories will be exceeded... He... the King of kings... and we... His friends... Oh! Most High God! Who will give me strength for that hour?... I wish my father were still alive!...» Judas is elated. He is bright evoking the future which he dreams of living.

Jesus is far ahead. But He stops. The future king according to Judas, is thirsty and cups His hands to get some water from a little stream, and drink... like a bird or a grazing lamb. He then turns round and says: «There are some wild fruits here. Let us pick some to appease our appetite...»

«Are You hungry, Master?» asks the Zealot.

«Yes, I am» Jesus confesses humbly.

«No wonder! You gave everything to that poor wretch yesterday evening!» exclaims Peter.

«But why did You not want to stop at Hebron?» asks Philip.

«Because God calls Me elsewhere. You do not know.»

The apostles shrug their shoulders and begin to pick the sour fruits of wild plants scattered over the mountain slopes. They look like tiny wild apples. And the King of kings feeds on them with His companions, who make wry faces because of the sourness of the wild unripe fruit. Jesus, engrossed in thought, eats and smiles.

«You almost make me angry!» exclaims Peter.

«Why?»

«Because You could have been comfortable and the people of Hebron would

have been happy, instead You are ruining Your stomach and teeth with this poison, which is more bitter and sour than grass dressed with vitriol.»

«Oh! I have you who love Me! When I am raised and I am hungry and thirsty, I will think with longing desire of this hour, of this food, of you who are now with Me, and who then...»

«But you will be neither hungry nor thirsty then! A king has everything! And we will be even closer to You!» exclaims the Iscariot.

«You say so.»

«And do You think that that will not happen, Master?» asks Bartholomew.

«No, Bartholmai. When I saw you under the fig-tree, its fruit was so sour that any man who had eaten of it, would have had his tongue and throat scorched... But the sour fruit of a fig-tree or of these plants is sweeter than a honeycomb compared to what My accession will be for Me... Let us go...» and He sets forth again, ahead of everybody, meditating, while the apostles behind Him whisper...

397. Farewell to Bethzur.

9th March 1946.

It is hardly daybreak when the untiring walkers arrive in sight of Bethzur. Tired as they are, with their garments creased after an uncomfortable rest in a wood, they look at the little town now close at hand with joy, as they are sure that they will find hospitality there.

The peasants going to work are the first to meet Jesus, and they wisely think that it is better to forget about their work and go back to town to listen to the Master. And some shepherds do likewise after asking whether He is going to stop in town.

«I will leave Bethzur in the evening» replies Jesus.

«And are You going to speak, Master?»

«Certainly.»

«When?»

«At once.»

«We have our flocks... Could You not speak here, in the country? The sheep would graze and we would not miss Your word.»

«Follow Me. I will speak in the pastures north of the town. I must see Eliza first.»

With their sticks the shepherds make the sheep turn back and they follow the men with their bleating flocks. They go through the town.

But the news has already reached Eliza's house. And it is in the square before the house that Eliza and Anastasica pay their homage of disciples to the Master, Who blesses them.

«Come into my house, Lord. You relieved it of distress and now its inhabitants and everything in it wish to be of comfort to You» says Eliza.

«Yes, Eliza. But do you see how many people are following us? I will now speak to everybody and later, after the third hour, I will come and stay in your house, and I will depart in the evening. And we will be able to talk to each other...» promises Jesus to console Eliza, who was hoping He would be staying longer and thus looks disappointed hearing Jesus' intentions

But Eliza is a good disciple and does not object. She only asks to be allowed to give instructions to the servants, before following Jesus. And she does so quickly. She is quite different from the inert woman of the previous year...

Jesus is standing in a large meadow on which the sun filters joyfully through the light leaves of forest-trees, which, if I am not mistaken, are ash-trees, and He is curing a boy and an old man, the former suffering from some internal disease, the latter from eye trouble. There are no other sick people, and Jesus blesses the little ones offered by their mothers, while waiting patiently for Eliza and Anastasica. They arrive at last.

Jesus begins to speak at once.

«People of Bethzur, listen. Last year I told you what is to be done to gain the Kingdom of God. I now wish to confirm it, so that you may not lose what you have earned. This is the last time that the Master speaks to you thus, in a meeting where no one is missing.

Hereafter I may meet you by chance, one at a time, or in small groups, along the roads of our earthly fatherland. Later, much later, I will be able to see you in My Kingdom. But it will never be like this.

In future you will be told many things of Me, against Me, of yourselves and against yourselves. They will try to terrorise you. I say to you with Isaiah: do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you and I have called you by your name. Only those who abandon Me, will have reason to fear. Not those, who being faithful, are Mine. Be not afraid! You are Mine and I am yours. Neither the waters of rivers, nor the fire of stakes, nor stones, nor swords will be able to separate you from Me, if you persevere in Me, on the contrary, fire, water, swords and stones will join you to Me more and more and you will be like Me and will receive My reward. I will be with you in the hours of torture, in your trials, I will be with you until the hour of death; and afterwards nothing will be able to separate us.

Oh! My people! People whom I have called and gathered, whom I will call and gather even more when I am raised, drawing everything to Me, o chosen people, holy people, do not be afraid, because I am and will be with you and you will announce Me and will be therefore called My ministers, and I will give you, nay, I give you now, the order to speak to the north, south, east and west, to make everybody become the children of God, also those at the farthest borders of the world, so that everybody may recognise Me as their King and invoke Me by My true Name, and may partake of the glory for which they were created and may be the glory of Him Who created them and perfected them. Isaiah says that tribes and nations will invoke witnesses of My glory in order to believe. And where shall I find witnesses if the Temple and the Royal Palace, and the mighty castes hate Me and lie because they do not want to say that I am Who I am? Where shall I find them? *Here are, My God, My witnesses!* These people to whom I taught the Law, whose bodies and souls I cured, who were blind and now see, were deaf and now hear, were dumb and now can pronounce Your Name, these who were oppressed and have been freed, all these people to whom Your Word has been Light, Truth, Way and Life. You are My witnesses, servants chosen by Me that you may understand and believe and know that it is I.

I am the Lord, the Saviour. Believe that for your own welfare. Apart from Me there is no other Saviour. Believe that regardless of human or satanic innuendoes. *Forget everything else which you might have been told by a mouth that is not Mine and which differs from My word.* Reject everything else which you

may be told in future. To anybody wishing you to abjure the Christ say: “His works speak to our souls” and persevere in your faith. I have done much to give you an intrepid faith. I cured your sick people and relieved your sorrows, I taught you like a good Master, I listened to you like a Friend, I broke bread with you and shared drinks with you. But those are still the deeds of a saint and a prophet. But I will work more and such deeds that will remove every doubt which darkness may raise, as a whirlwind raises stormy clouds in a clear summer sky. Let the cloud go by remaining firm in your love for your Jesus, for this Jesus Who left the Father to come and save you and Who will give His life to give you Health.

You, whom I loved and I still love more than Myself, *because there is no greater love than sacrificing oneself for the sake of those whom one loves*, must not be inferior to those who in the prophecy of Isaiah are called wild beasts, dragons and ostriches, that is, heathens, idolaters, pagans, unclean people. Because when by Myself I witness the power of My love and of My Nature, defeating even Death by Myself – which is something that can be verified and no one will be able to deny, unless one is falsehood personified – they will say: “He was the Son of God!” and overcoming obstacles, apparently insurmountable, of centuries and centuries of filthy paganism, of darkness, of vice, they will come to the Light, to the Source, to Life. Be not like too many in Israel who do not offer Me holocausts, who do not honour Me with sacrifices, on the contrary they trouble Me with their iniquity and victimise Me with their hard hearts, and to My forgiving love they reply with their deceitful hatred, which undermines the ground to make Me fall and thus be able to say: “See? He fell because God struck Him.”

Citizens of Bethzur, be strong. Love My word, because it is true, and love My Sign, because it is holy. May the Lord be always with you and may you be with the servants of the Lord, all together, so that each of you may be where I am going and an eternal abode may be made in Heaven for all those who, after overcoming affliction and winning the battle, die in the Lord and rise in the Lord forever!»

«Lord, what do You mean? There are cries of triumph and cries of sorrow in Your words!» say some citizens.

«Yes. You are like one who is surrounded by his enemies» other people remark.
«And You almost infer that we shall be, too» others say.
«What is there in Your future, Lord?» ask some.

«Glory!» shouts Judas of Kerioth.
«Death!» whispers Eliza sighing and weeping.

«Redemption. The fulfillment of My mission. Be not afraid. Do not weep. Love Me. I am happy to be the Redeemer. Come, Eliza. Let us go to your house...» and He is the first to set out, squeezing through the crowd, which is upset by contrasting emotions.

«But why, Lord, do You always deliver such speeches?» asks Judas grumbling and reproaching. And he adds: «They do not befit a king.»

Jesus does not reply to him. He instead replies to His cousin James who asks Him, with tears shining in his eyes: «Brother, why do You always quote passages of the Bible in Your farewell speeches?»

«So that those accusing Me may not say that I talk nonsense or I blaspheme, and those who do not want to yield to the reality of facts may realise that *from the very beginning Revelation has always shown Me as the King of a Kingdom that is not human, but is intended, built and cemented by the immolation of the Victim, of the only Victim capable of re-creating the Kingdom of Heaven*, destroyed by Satan and the First Parents. Pride, hatred, falsehood, lust, disobedience destroyed it. *Humility, obedience, love, purity, sacrifice will rebuild it...* Do not weep, woman. Those whom you love and who are waiting, are pining for the hour of My immolation...»

They enter the house and while the apostles are busy refreshing themselves and appeasing their appetite, Jesus goes into the tidy flowery garden with Eliza, who says to Him: «Master, I am the only one who knows that Johanna wants to speak to You secretly. She sent Jonathan to me. He said: “For very grave matters”. Not even the daughter You gave me – and may You be blessed for Your gift – knows about it. Johanna sent servants everywhere looking for You. But they could not find You...»

«I was very far away, and I would have gone even farther, if My spirit had not urged Me to come back... Eliza, you will come with Me and the Zealot to Johanna's. The others will remain here for two days' rest and then they will come to Bether. You will come back here with Jonathan.»

«Yes, my Lord...» Eliza looks at Him with motherly love, she scans His face. She cannot help saying: «Are You suffering?»

Jesus shakes His head and although His gesture is not denial it is a clear sign of

depression.

«I am a mother... You are my God... but... Oh! my Lord! What do You think Johanna wants? You have been speaking of death, and I understood because in the Temple the virgins often read the Scriptures which mention You Saviour, and I remember those words. You were speaking of death and Your face was shining with heavenly joy... But it is not shining now... Mary was like a daughter to me... and You are Her Son... So, if it is not a sin to say so, I see You somehow as my son... Your Mother is far away... But a mother is beside You. Blessed Son of God, can I not relieve Your grief?»

«You are already relieving it, because You love Me. What do I think about what Johanna wants to tell Me? My life is like this rosery. You good women disciples are the roses. But if you take the roses away, what is left? Thorns...»

«But we will remain with You until death.»

«That is true. Until death! And the Father will bless you for the comfort you give Me. Let us go home and rest. At sunset we will leave for Bether.»

398. At Bether.

12th March 1946.

Jesus, followed by the Zealot who is leading by the reins the little donkey on which Eliza is riding, knocks at the door of the keeper at Bether. They have not taken the same road as the last time and they have arrived at Johanna's estate from the village spread on the western slopes of the mountain on which the castle rises.

The keeper, who recognises the Lord, hastens to open the gate wide, which is beside his little house and admits to the garden before the residence and is the beginning of the land of dreams, that is, of the rose gardens of Johanna. A strong scent of fresh roses and of attar of roses stagnates in the warm air at twilight and when the first evening breeze blows from the east causing the rosebushes to undulate, the scent becomes stronger, fresher and more genuine, because it comes from the hillocks planted with roseries and it overwhelms the heavy smell of the essence coming from a low wide shed placed against the western

wall of the estate.

The keeper says: «My mistress is over there. She goes there every evening, where the workers, who pluck the flowers and make the essence, gather. She speaks to them, asks them questions, cures them and comforts them. Oh! our mistress is good. She has always been. But... since she has been Your disciple... I will call her now... This is a very busy time and the usual workers are not enough, although since Passover she has taken on new servants and maidservants. Wait here, Lord...»

«No, I will go to her. May God bless you and give you peace» says Jesus raising His hand to bless the old keeper, to whom He has been listening patiently. And He goes towards the low wide shed.

The noise of His steps on the hard ground makes Matthias – a rather curious little boy – look out and rush out with a cry, arms outstretched, inviting and desiring an embrace. «Jesus is here! Jesus is here!» he shouts while running. And when he is already in the arms of the Lord, Who kisses him, Johanna looks out from the middle of her servants.

«The Lord!» she shouts, too, and falls on her knees on the spot to venerate Him at once. She prostrates herself and then stands up, with her face tinged purple with emotion, like the petal of a bright rose. She then moves towards Jesus. And she stoops to kiss His feet.

«Peace to you, Johanna. Did you want Me? I have come.»

«Yes, I wanted You, Lord...» Johanna turns pale and grave.

Jesus notices it. «Stand up, Johanna. Is Chuza well?»

«Yes, my Lord.»

«And little Mary, whom I do not see here?»

«Also, Lord... She has gone with Esther to take some medicines to a servant who is ill.»

«Is that why you called Me?»

«No, Lord... It was for... You.» Johanna clearly does not want to speak in the presence of all the people who have crowded round them.

Jesus understands and says: «All right. Let us go and see your roseries...»

«You must be tired, Lord. You will have to eat... You must be thirsty...»

«No. During the hot hours we stopped in the house of disciples of the shepherds. I am not tired...»

«Let us go then... Jonathan, prepare everything for the Lord and for those who are with Him... Come down, Matthias...» she orders the steward, who is standing respectfully beside her, and the little boy, who has cuddled in Jesus' arms, resting his dark-haired head in the hollow of Jesus' neck, like a little dove under its father's wing. The boy sighs heavily, but he hastens to obey.

But Jesus says: «No. He will come with us and will give us no trouble. He will be the little angel in whose presence nothing scandalous can be said or done and will thus prevent the least suspicion from arising in anybody's heart. Let us go...»

«Master, shall Eliza and I go into the house, or do You want us to come with You?» asks the Zealot.

«You may go.»

Johanna leads Jesus along the wide avenue, which divides the garden, towards the roseries that climb up and down the opposite slopes of her flowery estate. And she proceeds further, as if she wished to stand aloof where there are only rose-bushes, trees and little birds among the branches, in their last quarrels to find a place where to sleep or preparing their nestlings for the night. The roses, which this evening are closed buds and will open tomorrow and be cut with shears, smell sweetly before resting in the dew. They stop in a little valley between two undulations of the ground, where festoons of flesh-coloured roses smile on one side, and roses as red as congealing blood on the other. There, is a rock that is used as a seat, or as a table on which gatherers place their baskets. Shrivelled roses and petals lying among the grass and on the rock witness the day's work.

With her ring-adorned hand Johanna sweeps the waste flowers off the seat and says: «Sit down, Master. I have quite a lot to tell You.»

Jesus sits down and Matthias begins to run about on the grass until he finds it very interesting to chase a big frog, which had come there to enjoy the cool of the evening and he follows the poor creature, shouting and jumping joyfully, until his attention is attracted by the hole of a cricket and he begins to rummage in it with a little stick.

«Johanna, I am here to listen to you... Are you not going to speak?» asks Jesus after a moment's silence and He stops watching the boy, to look at the disciple who is standing before Him serious and silent.

«Yes, Master. But... it is very difficult and I think it will be painful to hear...»

«Speak with simplicity and confidence...»

Johanna kneels on the grass half-sitting on her heels, below Jesus, Who is sat higher up, on the seat, in an austere rigid attitude; as a man, He is more distant than if He were separated quite away by several obstacles, but as God and a Friend, He is close because of the kindness of His glance and His smile. And Johanna looks at Him in the mild twilight of a May evening. At last she speaks: «My Lord... before speaking... I must ask You a question... to know what You think... to ascertain whether I have misunderstood Your words. I am a woman, a foolish woman... perhaps I have dreamed and only now I know the real situation... as You explained things, as You prepared them, as You want them for Your Kingdom... Perhaps Chuza is right... and I am wrong...»

«Has Chuza reproached you?»

«He has and he has not, Lord. He only said to me, with the authority of a husband, that if the situation is as recent facts make him think it is, I must leave You, because he, as Herod's dignitary, cannot allow his wife to conspire against Herod.»

«And when have you been a conspiratress? Who is thinking of harming Herod? His poor throne, which is so filthy, is inferior to this seat among these rose-bushes. I am sitting here, but I would not sit there. Chuza need not worry! I have no desire for Caesar's throne, never mind Herod's. They are not My thrones, or My kingdoms.»

«Oh! Is that so, Lord? May You be blessed! How much peace You give me! I have been suffering for days because of that! My holy and divine Master, my dear Master, my Master as I always understood, saw and loved You, so high, so high above the Earth, so... so divine, o my Lord and heavenly King!» and Johanna takes Jesus' hand and respectfully kisses the back of it, on her knees, as if she were in adoration.

«But what happened? Something of which I am unaware, which could upset you so much as to dim in you the pellucidity of My moral and spiritual figure? Tell Me!»

«What? Master, the fumes of error, of pride, of greed, of stubbornness have risen as if from fetid craters and have obscured You in the opinion of some men and women... and they tried to do the same with me. But I am Your Johanna, Your grace, o God. And I would not have got lost, at least I hope so, knowing how good is God, but who is only the embryo of a soul struggling to improve, may die through deceit. And he who is in an oozy sea, roughened by heavy currents, and strives to reach the shore, the harbour, to be purified and find other places of peace and justice, may be overcome by tiredness, if he loses confidence in the shore and those places, and may be swept away again by the currents and the mud. And I was sorry for and worried about the ruin of such souls, for whom I implore Your Light. The souls we perfect in the eternal Light are dearer to us than the bodies we give birth to in the earthly light. I now understand what it is to be the mother of a body and the mother of a soul. We mourn over the death of a child of ours. But it is only our grief. *But for a soul which, we have endeavoured to perfect in Your Light and which dies, we do not suffer by ourselves. We suffer with You, with God... because in our grief for the spiritual death of a soul there is also Your sorrow, the infinite sorrow of God... I do not know whether I have made myself understood...*»

«Yes, you have. But give Me a precise account, if you want Me to comfort you.»

«Yes, Master. You sent Simon Zealot and Judas of Kerioth to Bethany, did You not? It was in regard to that Jewish girl who was given to You by the Roman ladies and who was sent by You to Nike...»

«Yes, I did. So?...»

«And she wanted to say goodbye to her good mistresses, and Simon and Judas took her to the Antonia. Did You know?»

«I did. Well?»

«Master... I am afraid I must grieve You... Master, You are really only a spiritual King? You are not aiming at earthly kingdoms?»

«Of course not, Johanna. How can you still doubt that?»

«Master, only to have once again the joy of seeing You as a divine being, nothing but a divine being. And just because You are such, I must give deep sorrow to You... Master, the man from Kerioth does not understand You, neither does he understand those who respect You as a wise man, a great philosopher,

as Virtue on the Earth, and admire You and promise to protect You as such. It is strange that heathen ladies should understand what one of Your apostles does not understand, after being such a long time with You...»

«His human nature, his human love blind him.»

«You excuse him... But he is injuring You, Master. While Simon was speaking to Plautina, Lydia and Valeria, Judas spoke to Claudia on Your behalf, as Your ambassador. He wanted to wring from her promises for the restoration of the kingdom of Israel. Claudia asked him many questions... And he told her a good lot. He certainly thinks that he is on the threshold of his silly dream, when a dream becomes reality. Master, Claudia was irritated. She is a daughter of Rome... The empire is in her blood... Is it possible that a daughter of the Claudii family would plot against Rome? She was so shocked that she began to doubt about You and the holiness of Your doctrine. She still cannot conceive or understand the holiness of Your Origin... But she eventually will, because she is full of good will. She will understand, when she is reassured about You. For the time being You seem a false greedy rebel and usurper to her... Plautina and the other ladies have tried to reassure her... But she wants an immediate reply from You.»

«Tell her not to fear. I am the King of kings, I create them and judge them, and I will have no other throne but that of the Lamb, first sacrificed and then triumphant in Heaven. Let her know at once.»

«Yes, Master. I will go personally. Before they leave Jerusalem, because Claudia is so irritated that she does not want to stay any longer at the Antonia, as she says... that she does not want to see the enemies of Rome.»

«Who told you that?»

«Plautina and Lydia. They came... and Chuza was present... and later... he put me in the dilemma: either You are the spiritual Messiah or I must leave You for good.»

A sad smile appears on Jesus' face, which has turned pale with grief at the report of Johanna and He asks: «Is Chuza not coming here?»

«Tomorrow is the Sabbath and he will come.»

«And I will reassure him. Do not fear. Let no one fear. Chuza must not fear for his position at Court, or Herod for possible usurpations, or Claudia for the sake

of Rome, and you must not be afraid of being deceived or of the possibility of being separated... Let no one be afraid... I only must fear... and suffer...»

«Master, I wish I could not have grieved You thus. But not informing You, would have been as good as deceiving You... Master, how will You behave with Judas?... I am afraid of his reactions... only and always for Your sake...»

«With sincerity. I will make him understand that I know and that I disapprove of his action and his obstinacy.»

«He will hate me because he will understand that I told You...»

«Are you sorry for that?»

«Your hatred would upset me. Not his. I am a woman. But I am more virile in serving You than is he. *I serve You because I love You, not to receive favours from You.* If because of You in future I should lose my wealth, the love of my husband, and my very freedom and life, I would love You even more. Because in that case I would have but You to love and to be loved by» says Johanna impulsively, standing up.

Jesus also stands up and says: «May you be blessed, Johanna, for what you have said. And be in peace. Neither Judas' hatred nor his love can change what is written in Heaven. My mission will be accomplished, as it was decided. Feel no remorse, never. Be as tranquil as little Matthias, who after working to make a house – a nicer one, according to him – for his cricket, has fallen asleep with his forehead on petals of roses, and is smiling... thinking that it is on roses. Because life is beautiful when one is innocent. I also smile, even if My human life has no flowers, but only withered petals that have fallen. But in Heaven I shall have all the roses of those who have been saved... Come. Night is falling. We shall soon not be able to see the path.»

Johanna is about to take the boy in her arms.

«Leave him... I will take him. Look how he smiles! He is certainly dreaming of Heaven... of his mother... of you... I also, in My grief of every hour, dream of Heaven... of My Mother and of good women disciples.»

And they slowly set out towards the house...

399. Jesus at Bether with Peter and Bartholomew.

13th March 1946.

Jesus is walking through the rose thickets where the gatherers are busy. He has thus the opportunity of speaking to this person and that one, and also to the widow, whom Johanna charitably employed as a servant at Passover, after the poor people's banquet. Her children are also there and they now look better. Thriving and serene they are working happily, each according to his own ability, while the younger ones, who cannot yet tell one rose from another or choose them according to their shades and freshness, are playing with other little children in the quietest places and their chattering mingles with the chirruping of nestlings greeting from tree branches the return of their parents with beakfuls of food.

Jesus turns His steps towards these little ones, bending over them, caressing them, settling little quarrels and lifting up those who have fallen and are whimpering, as they have dirtied themselves with earth or have scratched their hands or faces on the ground. And tears, quarrels, jealousies subside at once under the caresses and the words spoken by the Innocent One to innocents, and the cause of the quarrel or of the fall, that is a golden scarab, a coloured or shiny little stone, a flower... becomes an offer made to Jesus, Who has hands and belt full of them and Who, without being noticed, puts scarabs and ladybirds on the leaves of plants releasing them.

How many times I have now noticed Jesus' perfect tact towards little ones, in order not to mortify and disappoint them! With fascinating art He knows how to improve them and He makes Himself loved with what is apparently a mere trifle, but is instead the perfection of love adapted to the smallness of children... and to me.

Oh! He has always treated me as a «baby» to improve my misery, to make Himself loved! Afterwards, when I loved Him with my whole self, He treated me with a heavy hand, as an adult, turning a deaf ear to my entreaties: «Can You not see that I am a good-for-nothing?» He smiled and compelled me to perform the work of adults... Oh! only when poor Mary is thoroughly distressed, He becomes once again the Jesus of children for my poor soul, which is so incapable, and He is pleased with... my scarabs, little stones... flowers... with what I can give Him... and He makes me understand that He finds that they are lovely... and that He loves me because I am «a nonentity that relies on and is lost in The Infinite.»

My dear Jesus! Loved, madly loved! Loved with my whole self! Yes, I can declare it! On the eve of my forty-ninth birthday, on the eve of men's judgement on my work as mouthpiece, if I examine myself carefully, if I diligently search my spirit and my whole self to decipher the true words that are in me, I can now say that I love God, I realise that I love my God with my whole self. It took me forty-eight years to get to this total love, so total as not to have one thought of personal fear in the prevision of a condemnation, as I only worried about the repercussions such conviction might have in the souls that were led to God by me, and are convinced that they were redeemed by Jesus living in me, and would break off from the Church, the link joining mankind to God. Some people may say: «Are you not ashamed of having taken such a long time?» No, not in the least. I was so weak, such a mere nothing, that it took me all that time. In any case I am convinced that it took me exactly the time that Jesus wanted. Not one minute more, not one less; because I can say this: since I began to understand what is God, I have never refused God anything. Since the time, when I a four-year-old girl – felt Him to be so omnipresent that I believed Him to be even in the wood of the back of the chair on which I sat and I apologised to Him for turning my back on Him and leaning on Him; since the time when – still a four-year-old girl – even in my sleep I pondered how our sins had wounded and killed Him, and I would stand up on my bed, in my long night-gown, and without looking at any holy picture, but addressing my beloved Jesus killed on our behalf, I would implore Him: «Not I! Not I! Let me die but don't tell me that I wounded You!» And my heart rose...

You are aware, o my Love, of my fervent emotions. You are acquainted with every one of them... You know that a simple hint of a proposal of Yours was accepted at once by Your Mary. Even if You proposed that I should give You the love of a sweetheart nay just then, at Christmas in 1921, my love for You

was confirmed – or the love of relatives, or my life, health, wealth... and that I should become more and more a «nonentity» in social life, a piece of wreckage looked upon with pity or derision by the world, one that cannot take a glass of water by herself if she is thirsty and there is no one who hands it to her, one nailed like You, yes like You, and as I have so eagerly wished to be, and as I would like to become immediately once again, if You should cure me. Everything! The nonentity has given everything, her whole being as a creature... Well, even now, yes even now, when I may be judged badly and interdicted and I may be struck, what shall I say to You? «Remain with me, You and Your Grace. All the rest is nothing. I only beg You not to deprive me of Your love and not to allow those, whom I brought to You, to fall back into darkness.»

But where have I gone, o my Sun, while You are walking around the rose thickets? Where my heart, that has made an effort of love for You, leads me. And it throbs and inflames the blood in my veins. And people will say: «She has a temperature and is suffering from palpitations.» No. The fact is that this morning You are rushing into me with the strength of a divine hurricane of love, and I... and I vanish in You as You pervade me, and I no longer think straight as a human creature, but I experience what it must be to live as seraphim... and I am inflamed and delirious and I love You, I love You, I love You. Have pity, in Your love! Have pity, if You want me to live on and serve You, o most divine eternal Love, o most sweet Love, o Love of Heaven and of Creation, God, God, God... No! Do not have pity! Even more love! Even more! To the extent of death on the stake of love! Let us melt into each other! Let us love each other! That we may be in the Father, as You said praying for us: «*Let those who love Me be where We are. One thing only.*» One thing only! That is one of the words of the Gospel that have always made me sink into an abyss of loving adoration. What You asked for us, o my Divine Master and Redeemer! What You asked, o my Divine Master, mad in love! That we may be one only with You, with the Father, with the Holy Spirit, because who is in One is in the Three, o inseparable and yet free Trinity of the God One and Trine! Blessed! Blessed! Blessed with each throb and breathing of mine!...

But let us go back to the vision since... I now see Peter coming forward with so rapid a step that his garments flutter like a sail swollen by the wind. He is followed by Bartholomew who is proceeding more calmly. Peter arrives unexpectedly behind Jesus, Who is bent fondling some sucklings, the children of the gatherers, lying on folding seats in the shade of trees. «Master!»

«Simon! How come you are here? And you, too, Bartholomew? You were to leave tomorrow evening, after the sunset of the Sabbath...»

«Master, do not reproach us... Listen to us first.»

«I will listen to you. And I do not reproach you because I believe that you must have a grave reason for disobeying. But reassure Me that none of you is ill or hurt.»

«No, no, Lord. No harm befell us» Bartholomew hastens to add.

But Peter, always sincere and impulsive, states: «H'm! As far as I am concerned, it would have been better if each of us had broken legs, or even if our heads were injured, rather than...»

«But what happened?»

«Master, we thought that it was better to come to put an end to... »

Bartholomew is saying, when Peter interrupts him: «Hurry up in telling Him!» And he concludes: «Judas has become a demon since You left. We could no longer speak or reason. He has quarrelled with everybody... And he has scandalised all the servants of Eliza and other people as well...»

«Perhaps he has become jealous because You took Simon with You...» says Bartholomew apologetically, when he sees that Jesus' countenance has become very severe.

«Nonsense! What jealousy?! Stop excusing him!... Or I will start quarrelling with you to give vent to my feelings, since I did not brawl with him... Because, Master, I succeeded in being quiet! Just imagine! Quiet! To obey You and for Your sake... What an effort! Well. When Judas went away slamming the door, we consulted with one another... and we thought it was better to leave in order to put an end to the scandal in Bethzur and... to avoid boxing his ears... And Bartholomew and I left at once. I asked the others to let me go at once, before he came back... because... because I felt that I could not control myself any longer... Well. I have told You. You can now reproach me if You think that I made a mistake.»

«You have done the right thing. You have all done the right thing.»

«Also Judas? Oh! no, my Lord! Don't say that! He made a deplorable spectacle of himself!»

«No. He did not do the right thing. But it is not for you to judge him.»

«No, Lord...» His «no» is uttered with great difficulty.

There is a moment's silence. Then Peter asks: «But will You at least tell me why Judas has become thus all of a sudden? He seemed to have become so good! Everything was so pleasant! I said prayers and made sacrifices that it might last... Because I cannot see You depressed. And You are distressed when we misbehave... And since the feast of the Dedication I know that even the sacrifice of a spoonful of honey is of great value... A disciple, the youngest disciple, a poor boy, had to teach this truth to me, Your stupid apostle. But I did not neglect it. Because I saw its fruit. Because I also, although a blockhead, have understood something through the light of Wisdom that bent benignly over me, touching me, a coarse fisherman, a sinner. I have understood that we must love You not only with words, but by saving souls with our sacrifice, in order to give You joy, and not see You as You are now, as You were at Shebat. You are so pale and sad, my Master and Lord, Whom we are not worthy to have, Whom we do not understand, as we are worms near You, the Son of God, we are mud near You, the Star, we are darkness, You are Light. But it was of no avail! It is true! My poor offerings... so poor... so badly made... What purpose could they serve? It was pride on my part to believe that they might serve... Forgive me. But I gave You what I had. I offered myself to give You what I have. And I thought that I was justified, because I love You, my God, with all myself, with all my heart, and with all my soul, with all my strength, as it is written. And now I understand also this and I also say what John, our angel, always says, and I beg You (and he kneels at Jesus' feet) to increase Your love in Your poor Simon, so that my love may increase for You, my God.» And Peter prostrates himself to kiss Jesus' feet, and remains thus.

Bartholomew, who has been listening admiring and assenting, imitates him.

«Stand up, My friends. My love grows deeper and deeper in you and will grow more and more. And may you be blessed because of your hearts. When are the others coming?»

«Before sunset.»

«Very well. Also Johanna, Eliza and Chuza will come back before sunset. We shall spend the Sabbath here, and then we shall leave.»

«Yes, my Lord. But why did Johanna send for You so urgently? Could she not

have waited? It had been arranged for us to come here! Through her imprudence she has caused all this trouble!...»

«Do not reproach her, Simon of Jonah. She acted out of prudence and love. She sent for Me because there were souls to be confirmed in their good will.»

«Ah! In that case I will say no more... But, my Lord, why has Judas changed so much?»

«Forget about it! Enjoy this Eden, so full of flowers and peace. Enjoy your Lord. Leave and forget about humanity in all its worse forms, in its attacks against the soul of your poor companion. Remember only to pray for him... very hard. Come. Let us go to those little ones who are looking at us full of amazement. I was speaking to them of God, a little while ago, from soul to soul, with love, and I was talking to the bigger ones through the beautiful things of God...» And He embraces the waists of His two apostles and turns His steps towards a group of children waiting for Him.

400. Farewell to Bether.

16th March 1946.

I do not know how I shall manage to write, worn out as I am with continual heart attacks by day and by night... But I am beginning to see and I must write.

I see Jesus before the mansion-house of Johanna at Bether. The garden in front of it widens out forming a semicircular open space by means of two green pincer-shaped wings. The central part of the open space is bare and is bordered by old tall leafy trees rustling in the light breeze blowing on the top of this hill, and casting a pleasant shade that protects from the sun in afternoons. Hedges of roses beneath the trees form a colourful sweet-smelling semicircle around the open space.

The sun is about to set and, as this castle is on a high position, one can clearly see that it is descending towards the horizon and is about to hide behind the western mountains. Andrew points those mountains to Philip, reminding him of their fear, when they had to announce the Lord at Bethgenna. Bethgenna is in fact on those mountains, where the Lord the previous year cured the daughter of

the hotel-keeper, at the beginning of His pilgrimage towards the Mediterranean shores, if my memory does not fail me. I am all alone, so I cannot get anyone to give me the copy-books of months ago to check, and my head just cannot remember.

All the apostles are present. I do not know what happened when Jesus and Judas met. Apparently everything went very well, because I do not see any stand-offishness or excitement in anybody and Judas is free and easy and cheerful, as if nothing had happened. In fact he is very kind also to the most humble servants, which is most unusual of him, particularly when he is upset.

Eliza is still here and also Anastasica, who has certainly come here with the apostles and Eliza's maidservant. And there is Chuza, who is very ceremonious and is holding Matthias by the hand. Johanna is near Eliza and little Mary is beside her. Jonathan is behind his mistress.

Jesus is protected from the sun, which is still shining on the western side of the house, by a tent that has been stretched out on ropes and poles, like a canopy. All the servants and gardeners of Bether, including casual labourers from the village, which comes under the castle, are before Jesus. They are in the shade of the leafy trees of the semicircle, protected from the sun and are standing in silence, lined up, awaiting the blessing of the Master, Who seems to be on the point of departing and is only waiting for sunset to indicate the end of the Sabbath.

Jesus is now speaking to Chuza a little aside. I do not know what He is saying to him, because they are speaking in low voices. But I see that Chuza is lavish in bows and protestations, and presses his right hand against his breast, as if to say: «Upon my word, You may rest assured that as far as I am concerned» etc.

The apostles have gathered discreetly in a corner. But no one can prevent them from watching, and if Peter and Bartholomew are watching with the simple naturalness of people who are already somehow aware of the situation, the others, and particularly James of Alphaeus, John, Simon and Andrew, appear to be anxious and sad, while Judas of Alphaeus looks upset and severe. The Iscariot is the only exception, as he wishes to appear free and easy, whereas he watches more keenly than the others, and he seems to be anxious to make out, from the gestures of their hands and from their lips, what Jesus and Chuza are saying.

The women disciples are also watching silently and respectfully, and Johanna

smiles unintentionally, a somewhat ironical smile in its sadness, and she seems to be pitying her husband when Chuza, raising his voice at the end of the conversation, declares: «My debt of gratitude is such that in no way will I ever be able to free myself from my obligation. I, therefore, give You what is dearest to me: my Johanna... But You must understand my provident love for her... Herod's wrath... her self-defence... They would have given vent to their anger by taking reprisals upon our property,... and our influence... and Johanna is accustomed to these things, she is delicate... she needs them... I protect her interests. But I swear to You that now that I am sure that Herod will not be angry at me, as if I were an accomplice of his enemy, although his servant, I will do nothing but serve You with perfect joy, granting complete freedom to Johanna...»

«Very well. But remember that to barter eternal goods for a fleeting human honour, is like bartering one's birthright for a dish of lentils. And it is even much worse...»

The women disciples have heard the words. The apostles have also heard them. And while most of them consider it an academic speech, Judas of Kerioth perceives a special purport and he changes colour and countenance, casting a frightened angry glance at Johanna... I realise that so far Jesus has not spoken of what happened, and that only now Judas begins to suspect that his trick has been found out.

Jesus addresses Johanna saying: «Well, let us make our good disciple happy. As you wished, I will speak to your servants before leaving.»

He comes forward, as far as the limit of the shade, which is growing longer and longer as the sun sets slowly, and now looks like an orange mutilated of its lower part; and the mutilation increases as the sun sets behind the mountains of Bethganna setting the clear sky ablaze.

«My beloved friends Chuza and Johanna, and you, her good servants, who have known the Lord for many years through the words of My disciple Jonathan, and through Johanna's, since she has been My faithful disciple, listen.

I have taken leave of all the Judaeon villages, where My disciples are more numerous through the work of the first disciples, the shepherds, and because they have responded to the Word, Who passed by teaching them in order to save them. I am now taking leave of you because I will never come back to this Eden, which is so beautiful, not only because of the rose-bushes and peace reigning here, not only because of the excellent mastery which is sovereign here, but

above all because you believe in the Lord and you live according to His Word. A paradise! Yes. What was the paradise of Adam and Eve? A wonderful garden where they lived without sin, where the voice of God resounded and His first two children loved and listened to it with joy...

Well, I exhort you to watch that what happened in Eden may not happen to you: that the serpent of falsehood, of calumny, of sin may creep in and bite your hearts separating you from God. Be watchful and firm in your Faith... Do not fret. Do not be incredulous. That might happen because the Cursed One will enter, will strive to enter everywhere, as he has already entered many places, to destroy the work of God. And as long as the Sly, Cunning, Indefatigable One enters places, and searches, eavesdrops, lies in wait, slavers, endeavours to seduce, there is no great harm. Nothing and no one can prevent him from doing that. He did that in the Earthly Paradise... But it is much worse to let him stay there without driving him out. The enemy who is not chased away ends up by becoming the master of the place as he settles there and builds his defensive and offensive structures. Pursue him at once, put him to flight using the weapons of Faith, Charity, Hope in the Lord. But the greatest evil, the supreme evil is to let him live not only undisturbed amongst men, but to allow him to penetrate inside from the outside, and let him build his nest in the hearts of men. Oh! Then!! And yet many men have already received him in their hearts, against the Christ. They have welcomed Satan with his wicked passions driving away the Christ. If they had not yet known Christ in all His truth, if their knowledge of Him had been only superficial, as wayfarers know one another, when they meet by chance on a road, looking very often at one another just for a moment, people unknown to one another who meet for the first and last time, at times exchanging only few words to inquire about the right road, to ask for a pinch of salt, for tinder to light a fire, or a knife to cut some meat, if such were the knowledge of the Christ in such hearts, which today, and even more tomorrow drive the Christ away, more and more, to make room for Satan, they might still be pitied and treated mercifully because they did not know the Christ. *But woe to those who know Me for what I really am, who have been nourished with My word and My love, and now drive Me away, receiving Satan who allures them with false promises of human triumphs, the reality of which will be eternal damnation.*

You who are humble and do not dream of thrones and crowns, who do not seek human glory, but the peace and triumph of God, His Kingdom, love and eternal life, and nothing else, do not imitate them. Be vigilant! Keep free from corruption, be strong against insinuations, against threats, against everything.»

Judas, who has realised that Jesus knows something, has become livid with anger. He darts angry looks at the Master and at Johanna... He withdraws behind his companions, as if he wished to lean against the wall. In actual fact he does so to conceal his disappointment.

After a short interruption, which serves to separate the first part of His speech from the second one, Jesus goes on. He says:

«There was once Naboth, a Jezreelite, who had a vineyard close by the palace of Ahab, king of Samaria. It was the vineyard of his ancestors, therefore most dear and almost sacred to him, as it had been bequeathed to him by his father, who had inherited it from his father, who in turn, had received it by inheritance from his father and so on. Generations of relatives had worked hard in that vineyard to make it more flourishing and beautiful. Naboth was very fond of it. Ahab said to him: “Give me your vineyard that is near my house, as I want to use it as a vegetable garden for myself and my family. In exchange for it I will give you a better vineyard, or if you prefer, I will give you its worth in money.” But Naboth replied: “I am sorry to disappoint you, king. But I cannot satisfy your request. I received that vineyard by inheritance from my ancestors and it is sacred to me. God forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my ancestors.”

Let us meditate on that reply. It has been meditated on too little and by too few Israelites. Those whom I mentioned before, the majority of people, who are inclined to drive away the Christ to welcome Satan, do not have much respect for the inheritance of their ancestors, and provided they get much money or a great deal of land, that is, honours and the certainty that they will not be easily supplanted, they agree to give away the inheritance of their ancestors: that is, the Messianic idea for what it really is, as it was revealed to the saints of Israel, and should be held sacred in all its details, also the least ones, without tampering with it, or altering it, or degrading it with human limitations. How many barter the bright Messianic idea, entirely holy and spiritual, for a puppet of human regality, which they agitate as a bugaboo to injure and curse authorities and truth!

I, Mercy, do not go to the extent of anathematising them with the dreadful maledictions of Moses against the transgressors of the Law. But behind Mercy there is Justice. Let everybody bear that in mind! I, as far as I am concerned, remind them – and if there is anyone present here, let him accept My warning with good grace I remind them of other words of Moses, addressed to those who wanted to count more than God had decided for them.

Moses said to Korah, Dathan and Abiram, who said that they were equal to Moses and Aaron and rebelled against being considered only as the sons of Levi among the people of Israel: “Tomorrow the Lord will reveal who is His, who are the consecrated men that He will allow to come near Him. Those He allows to come near Him are the ones He has chosen. Put fire in your censers and incense on the fire before the Lord, and come, you and your followers with Aaron. And we shall see whom the Lord chooses. You take too much on yourselves, sons of Levi!”

My good Israelites, you know how God answered those who wanted to extol themselves too much, forgetting that God only allots positions to His children, electing them with justice to the right position. I also must say: “There are some who wish to exalt themselves too much and they will be punished so that good people will understand that they cursed the Lord.”

Those who barter the Messianic idea, as it was revealed by the Most High, for their poor, human, dull, limited, revengeful idea, are they not like those who wanted to judge the sacredness of Moses and Aaron? Do you not think that those who want to take initiatives of their own, proudly stating that they are better than God's, so that they may attain their object and have their poor plans accomplished, do you not think that they want to exalt themselves too much and pass illegally from the stock of Levi to the stock of Aaron? Those who dream of a poor king of Israel and prefer him to the spiritual King of kings, those whose eyes are diseased with pride and greed, whereby they see the eternal truth written in the holy books distorted, and those who cannot understand the most clear words of the revealed Truth because of the fever of their lustful humanity, are they not the ones who barter the heritage of the whole race, the most sacred heritage, for a worthless nothing?

But if they do so, I will not barter the inheritance of the Father and of our ancestors, and I will die faithful to the promise, which has been alive since there was the need for redemption, and I will be faithful to the obedience which has always existed, because I have never disappointed My Father, and I will never disappoint Him for fear of death, however dreadful death may be. Let My enemies produce false witnesses, let them feign zeal and perfect practices. That will not change their crime or affect My holiness. But he and those who, after corrupting him, have become his accomplices, think that they can take possession of what is Mine, will find dogs and vultures feeding on their blood and bodies on the Earth, and demons feeding on their sacrilegious deicide souls

in Hell.

I told you that, so that you may know. So that everybody may know. So that who is wicked may repent, while he is still in time, imitating Ahab, and who is good may not be upset in the hour of darkness.

Goodbye, children of Bether. May the God of Israel always be with you and may Redemption let dew descend on a clean field, so that all the seed, sown in your hearts by the Master, Who loved you even unto death, may germinate.»

Jesus blesses them and watches them go away slowly. The sun has set. Only a red hue, which slowly fades into violet, remains as remembrance of the sun. The Sabbath rest is over. Jesus can leave. He kisses the little ones, greets the women disciples and Chuza. And when He is near the gate, He turns round again and says in a loud voice, so that everybody may hear: «I will speak, when I can, to those people. But you, Johanna, do the necessary to let them know that I am the enemy of Sin only and the King of the spirit. And remember that, too, Chuza. And be not afraid. No one must be afraid of Me. Not even sinners, because I am Salvation. Only those who are unrepentant unto death must fear the Christ, Who will be Judge after being Infinite Love... Peace be with you» and He is the first to go out and begin to descend...

401. Simon of Jonah's Struggle and Spiritual Victory.

25th March 1946.

In Nomine Domini. And I am resuming, at long last, to write about you, o sweet Gospel, following my Master holily along the roads of Palestine! I resume you after fulfilling all my tasks in obedience to the orders. It would be better to say: «You resume me.»

I do not know whether anyone ponders on the mute but so instructive lesson that the Lord gives through His silence, brought about by three different reasons:

1st pity for the weakness of His sick mouthpiece who at times is almost dying;
2nd silence as a punishment for those who do not conform properly to His gift;
3rd the lesson that He gives me, and of which I wish to speak, of our duty to always obey, even if obedience may seem inferior to the work we have to

interrupt in order to obey.

Oh! it is not easy to be a «mouthpiece»! One lives in continuous vigilance and obedience. And Jesus, Who is the Master of the world, does not take the liberty of allowing His instrument to disobey an order, when obedience is exacted by a person authorised to do so.

During the past days I had to obey the orders given to me by Father Migliorini. They were bureaucratic matters and thus rather boring. But Jesus never interfered because I had to obey. And my obedience was to be precise and complete, as Azariah said yesterday explaining Holy Mass.

But now, as I have done everything, I can contemplate You, my Lord, while You descend the steep path towards the fertile valley, leaving behind the castle of Bether, still bright in the dying day, up there, on the flowery hill... leaving there the love of the women disciples, of the little ones, of the humble people, descending towards the roads that take to Jerusalem, towards the world, towards the lower part... And it is darker there not only because it is a «valley» and thus sunshine and light are no longer there, but above all because down there, in the world, there are snares, bitter hatred, so much evil waiting for You, my Lord...

Jesus is ahead of them all: a white silent figure, walking stately also while descending uncomfortable abrupt paths, taken to shorten the journey. In the descent His long tunic and wide mantle trail on the ground and Jesus seems already enveloped in a royal mantle with a train behind His steps.

Behind Him, not so majestic, but equally silent, are the apostles... Judas, a little outdistanced, is last: he looks ugly in his rage. Now and again the more simple ones: Andrew, Thomas, turn round and look at him, and Andrew says to him: «Why are you remaining all alone, so far behind? Are you not feeling well?». His question brings about a sharp reply: «Mind your own business» that surprises Andrew, also because it is followed by a rude epithet.

Peter is second in the line of the apostles, behind James of Alphaeus, who is immediately behind the Master. And Peter hears the rude reply, in the deep silence of the evening. And he turns round abruptly and is about to go back towards Judas. But he stops. He is pensive for a moment, then runs towards Jesus, He takes Him brusquely by the arm and shakes Him saying eagerly: «Master, can You assure me that what You told me the other evening is really true? That sacrifices and prayers never lack success, even if they seem to serve no purpose?...»

Jesus, meek, sad, pale, looks at His Simon who is perspiring in the effort not to react at once to the insult, and is purple and trembling, and perhaps is hurting Him as he is holding His arm so roughly, and He replies with a peaceful sad smile: «They are never without reward. You may rest assured.»

Peter leaves Him and goes away, not to his place, but to the slope of the mountain, among the trees and he gives vent to his feelings by breaking shrubs and young plants with a violence that was directed elsewhere but is discharged here on tree-trunks.

«What are you doing? Are you mad?» many ask him.

Peter does not reply. He goes on breaking. He lets all the apostles, including Judas, overtake him, while he breaks... and breaks. He is so fast that he seems to be on piece-work. At his feet there is a bundle of sticks that would suffice to roast a veal. He loads it on to his shoulder with some difficulty and he strives to reach his companions. I do not know how he can manage – hampered as he is by his mantle – the weight, his haversack and the uncomfortable path. But he proceeds with a stoop, as if he were under the yoke...

And Judas laughs seeing him and says: «You look like a slave!»

Peter looks up with difficulty from under the yoke and is about to say something. But he remains silent, he grinds his teeth and goes on.

«I will help you, brother» says Andrew.

«No.»

«But that wood is too much for a lamb» remarks James of Zebedee.

Peter does not reply. He proceeds. He must be exhausted. But he does not give up.

At last, at a grotto almost at the bottom of the descent, Jesus stops with all the apostles. «We are staying here, and we will leave at daybreak» orders the Master. «Prepare the supper.»

Peter then throws his load on the ground and sits on it, without explaining to anybody the reason for his great effort, while there is plenty firewood about.

But when the apostles move around, some to get drinking water, some to clean the floor of the grotto, some to wash the lamb before cooking it, and Peter is left alone with his Master, Jesus, standing up, lays His hand on Simon's grey-haired

head, and caresses that honest head... Peter then clasps that hand and kisses it, he holds it against his cheek, kisses it again and caresses it... A drop falls on the white hand, a drop which is not perspiration of the coarse honest apostle, but a silent tear of love and suffering, of victory after the struggle. And Jesus bends and kisses him saying: «Thank you, Simon!»

Peter is certainly not a handsome man. But when he throws back his head to look at his Jesus Who has kissed him and thanked him, because He only has understood, veneration and joy do make him handsome...

And the vision ends on this transformation.

402. Going towards Emmaus on the Plain.

27th March 1946.

Dawn is casting a milky-green luminosity on the vault of heaven, high above the cool silent valley. And its glimmer, which is and is not yet light, reaches the top of the two slopes. It seems to be caressing lightly the highest parts of the Judaeian mountains, saying to the old trees which crown them: «Here I am, I am descending from heaven, I am coming from the east, preceding daybreak, and I drive away darkness and bring light, activity and the blessing of a new day granted to you by God.» And the mountain tops are roused by the rustling leaves and the chirping of the first birds awakened by the trembling branches and the first faint light. And dawn descends lower, down to the undergrowth, to the grass, to declivities, lower and lower, greeted by the increasing chirping among branches and the rustling noise of green lizards among the grass. And it finally reaches the little stream, down at the bottom, and changes its dark waters into a dull silvery sparkling that becomes steadily clearer and clearer and more and more brilliant. And in the meantime, up there, in the sky, where the indigo of the night has faded into a greenish pale blue, the first announcement of sunrise appears, making it azure tinged with pink... And a cirrus appears, small, fluffy, already rosy foam...

Jesus comes out of the grotto and looks... He then washes in the stream, He tidies Himself, puts on His clothes, looks into the grotto... But He does not call... Instead He climbs the mountain, and goes to pray on a protruding peak, which is

so high that it is possible to see a wide view to the east, now completely rosy at dawn, and to the west still tinged with indigo. He prays... ardently, on His knees, with His elbows on the ground, almost prostrate... And He prays thus, until He hears the voices of the awakened disciples calling Him.

He stands up and replies: «I am coming!» And the echo of the narrow valley repeats several times the echo of the perfect voice. And the valley seems to be spreading over the plain, dimly visible to the west, the promise of the Lord: «I am coming» so that the plain may rejoice in advance.

Jesus sets out with a sigh and a sentence that summarises His long prayer and clarifies it: «Father, comfort Me...»

He descends quickly and when He arrives at the bottom, He greets His apostles with a most kind smile and the usual words: «Peace be with you on this new day.»

«And with You, Master» they all reply.

Judas also is not so grim and solitary, I do not know whether because he is reassured by Jesus' silence, Who has not reproached him and treats him exactly as the others, or because during the night he has worked out a plan to his own advantage. In fact he asks on behalf of everybody: «Are we going to Jerusalem? If we are, we will have to go back a little and cross that bridge. On the other side there is a road that takes one straight to Jerusalem.»

«No. We are going to Emmaus on the plain.»

«Why? And what about Pentecost?»

«There is time. I want to go to see Nicodemus and Joseph, along the plains, towards the sea...»

«But why?»

«Because I have not been there yet and those people are waiting for Me... And because the good disciples wish so. We shall have time for everything.»

«Is that what Johanna told You? Is that why she called You?»

«There was no need for that. They told Me personally at Passover. And I keep My promises.»

«I would not go there... Perhaps they are already in Jerusalem... The festivity is

close at hand... And in any case... You might meet some enemies, and...»

«I meet enemies everywhere, they are always close to Me...» and Jesus darts a glance at the apostle, who is His grief...

Judas speaks no more. It is too dangerous to go into details! He realises it and becomes silent.

John and Andrew come back with some little fruits, which seem to belong to the raspberry or strawberry families, but are a little darker, almost like unripe blackberries, and they offer them to Jesus: «You like them. We saw them yesterday evening and we went up now to pick them for You. Eat them, Master. They are good.»

Jesus caresses the two good young apostles who are offering Him the fruit on a large leaf washed in the stream, and who, more than their fruit, offer Him their love. Jesus picks the nicest ones and gives some to each of the apostles who eat them with some bread.

«We tried to get some milk for You. But there are no shepherds about as yet...» says Andrew apoloising.

«It does not matter. Let us walk fast so that we may be at Emmaus before it gets very warm.»

And they set out and those who are more hungry continue to eat, while walking along the cool valley, which becomes wider and wider, ending in a very fertile plain, where reapers are already working hard.

«I did not know that Nicodemus had houses at Emmaus» remarks Bartholomew.

«Not at Emmaus. Farther on. Relatives' fields which he inherited...» explains Jesus.

«How beautiful the country is!» exclaims Thaddeus.

It is in fact a sea of golden ears interlaced with orchards, which are a real dream, and with vineyards already promising glorious grapes. Well-watered as it is, because the nearby mountains pour numberless little torrents into it in the months when irrigation is required most, and because it is provided with underground streams, it is a real agricultural Eden.

«H'm! It is more beautiful than last year's» grumbles Peter.

«At least there is water and fruit...»

«The plain of Sharron is even more beautiful» replies the Zealot.

«But is this not it?»

«No, it is after this one. But this one is already affected by it...» The two apostles move away from the group speaking to each other.

«It belongs to Pharisees, does it not?» asks James of Zebedee, pointing at the beautiful country.

«It certainly belongs to Judaeans. They usurped the best estates, taking them off the previous owners in many ways» replies Thaddeus, who perhaps remembers his ancestors' property in Judaea, from which they were driven away suffering a severe loss.

The Iscariot takes offence at the remark and says: «If they were taken off you it is because you, Galileans, are less holy, you are inferior...»

«May I remind you that Alphaeus and Joseph were of the house of David. So much so that the Edict compelled them to go and register at Bethlehem in Judah. And that is why He was born there» calmly replies James of Alphaeus, anticipating a biting reply from his impetuous brother, and pointing at the Lord Who is speaking to Matthew and Philip.

«Oh! Well! I would say that there is good and bad everywhere. In our trade we approached people of all races and I assure you that I have found honest and dishonest people in every race. In any case... why boast of being Judaeans? Did we perhaps want that? H'm! When I was in my mother's womb I knew nothing about being Judaeans or Galileans! I was there... and that was all. And when I was born, I was enveloped comfortably in swaddling clothes, without worrying whether I was breathing Judaeans or Galileans air... I was aware only of my mother's teat... And you were all like me. So why be upset now, because one was born in the north and another in the south? Do we not all belong to Israel?» says Thomas kindly and rightly.

«You are right, Thomas» replies John. And he concludes: «And now we belong to one stock only: to Jesus'!»

«And He is of Judaeans extraction, but was conceived and resides in Galilee, after He was born in Bethlehem, as if He wanted to tell us, through the evidence of events, that He is the Redeemer of all Israel, from the north to the south. And

I think that the Most High wanted that to teach us that divisions are against the love for our neighbour and that He has been sent to gather everybody like the brooding-hen mentioned in the Holy Books. Just because He is called “the Galilean”, one ought not to disregard Galileans» says James of Alphaeus kindly but firmly.

Jesus, Who seemed inattentive while speaking to Matthew and Philip, a few steps ahead of the others, turns round and says: «You are right, James of Alphaeus. You understand the Truth and the truths, and the justice of every act of God. *Because God, and this should be always borne in mind by everyone, never does anything aimlessly, as He never leaves without a reward what upright people do. Blessed are those who can see the reasons of God even in the least events and the answers of God to the sacrifices of men.*»

Peter turns round and is about to speak. But he remains silent and he only smiles at his Master, Who is back in the group of His apostles, as they are now walking on a wide main road between golden fields.

They proceed towards Emmaus, which is already close at hand, a group of white dazzling houses among the golden hue of ripe corn and the green of fertile orchards.

«Master! Master! Stop! Here are Your disciples!» shout voices from afar, and a handful of men, departing from some peasants resting in the shade of an apple-orchard, run towards Jesus along a sunny path. They are Matthias and John, formerly shepherds and later disciples of the Baptist, and with them there are Nicolaus, Abel once a leper, Samuel, Ermasteus and others.

«Peace to you. You are here?»

«Yes, Master. We have been along all the shores of the sea. We are now going towards Jerusalem. Farther north there is Stephen with other disciples. And farther up there is Hermas with others. And Isaac, our little master, is even farther north. At least he was. As Timoneus was in the region beyond the Jordan. But by now they are all about to come to the feast of Pentecost. We thus formed many groups, small ones, but active. And if they should persecute us, they may capture some, but not all of us» explains Matthias.

«You have done the right thing. I was surprised at not finding you anywhere in southern Judaea...»

«Master... You were going there... Who could do better than You? In any case...

Oh! Judaea has had more than is needed to become holy!... And yet!... They throw stones at those who take the word of Heaven to them. Elias and Joseph were beaten in the gorges of the Kidron and they went beyond the Jordan to Solomon's house. Joseph was almost killed by a stone that struck his head. They lived for eight days in a deep grotto, with the man You sent and who knew all the secrets of the mountains. Then at night, they slowly passed to the other side...»

The disciples and apostles are excited in recalling and hearing of such persecutions. But Jesus calms them saying: «The Innocents tinged with the purple of their innocent blood the way of the Christ. But that way is to be purpled over and over again, to erase the traces of Evil from the way of God. It is a regal road. Martyrs purple it for My sake. *Blessed among the blessed are those who suffer persecutions for My sake.*»

«Master, we were speaking to those peasants. Will You speak to them now?» asks John, the ex-shepherd.

«Go and tell them that I will speak at sunset near the gate of Emmaus. The sun prevents Me now. Go. And may God be with you. I will be at the end of this road.»

He blesses them and sets out again seeking shade, because the sun is very warm on the white road, on the sides of which two rows of plane-trees give very little shade.

403. Little Michael and Preaching near Emmaus on the Plain.

28th March 1946.

Near the gate of Emmaus there is a house of peasants. It is silent, because they are all in the fields, working. The sheaves of the previous day are already piled up on the threshing-floor. And hay is heaped in rustic hay-lofts. A warm smell comes from the hay and the sheaves in the scorching midday sun. With the exception of the cooing of doves and the chirping of gossipy quarrelsome sparrows, no other noise can be heard. Both fly unrelentingly from the roof or the nearby trees to the piles of sheaves and hay and first among those who will

enjoy those products, they peck the stiff ears, they deal one another blows with their wings, they struggle to snatch more seed or to steal the most tender blades of hay, like greedy unscrupulous warriors. They are the only thieves in Israel, where I noticed there is the greatest respect for other people's property. Houses may be left open and threshing-floors and vineyards unguarded! Apart from true robbers, the highwaymen who attack people in the gorges of mountains, there are no petty thieves, not even greedy people who would steal fruit or a little pigeon belonging to other people. Everybody goes his own way and also when they walk through their neighbour's property, they seem to have no eyes or hands. It is true that hospitality is so widely practised, that there is no need to steal in order to get something to eat. Only with regard to Jesus, and because hatred is so bitter as to compel people to neglect the age-old habit of being hospitable to pilgrims, only with regard to Him it happens that houses deny hospitality and food. But, generally speaking, they feel pity for other people, and the lower classes in particular do so.

Thus, after knocking at a door and not getting any answer, the apostles without any fear have taken shelter in a shed, where there are agricultural tools and empty pitchers and, as if everything belonged to them, they have taken some hay to sit on, some buckets to draw water from the well and pitchers to drink, and thus moisten the stale bread and cold lamb, which they eat almost in silence, as they are so sleepy and stupefied by the sun. And with the same freedom with which they used hay and pitchers, they lie down on the sweet-smelling hay and there is soon a snoring chorus varied in tone and duration.

Jesus also is tired. More than tired, He is sad. He looks for some time at the sleeping apostles. He is praying and thinking... He is thinking while His eyes follow mechanically the quarrelling sparrows and doves and the swallows darting over the sunny threshing-floor. The screams of those swift masters of flight seem to be resolute positive answers to the grievous questions that Jesus is asking Himself. Then He lies on the hay, too, and His sweet sad sapphire eyes are soon covered by His eyelids. And His face becomes motionless in sleep, and perhaps because He has fallen asleep with a heavy heart, His countenance is very much as tired and grievous as it will be at His death...

The peasants who own the house have come back: men, women and children. And the disciples seen previously are with them. They see Jesus and His apostles sleeping on the hay and their voices fade into whispers not to awake them. Some mothers smack their children who will not keep quiet, or they

threaten to do so.

A little fellow, with the steps of a little dove and a finger in his mouth, approaches Jesus and watches Him – «He is the nicest» he says – while He sleeps with His head resting on His folded arm as on a pillow. And all the rest, barefooted, on the tips of their toes, end up by imitating him, Matthias and John being the first, and they are deeply moved seeing Him sleep on the hay and Matthias remarks: «As in His first sleep... He is now... our Master, but less happy than then... He misses His Mother also...»

«Yes, He does. Only persecution is always close to Him. But we will always love Him, we have always loved Him as we did then...» replies John.

«Even more, Matthias. Much more. Then we loved Him only out of faith and because it is pleasant to love a baby. But now we love Him also because we know Him...»

«He has been hated since He was a baby, John. Remember what they did in order to strike Him!...» and Matthias goes pale remembering.

«That is true... But blessed be that sorrow! We lost everything but Him. And that is what matters. What use would it have been to us if we still had relatives, our homes and our little properties, if He were dead?»

«That's true. You are right, Matthias. And of what avail will it be to us to have the whole world, when He will no longer be in the world?»

«Don't tell me... Then we shall really be forlorn... You may all go. We are staying here near the Master» says John dismissing the peasants.

«We are sorry that we never thought of giving them the key. They could have come in and have been more comfortable...» says the oldest man of the household.

«We will tell Him... But He will be happy also because of your love. Go now...»

The peasants go home and the smoke rising from the chimney tells everybody that they are preparing food. But they do so gracefully, checking the children, making little noise... and likewise, they noiselessly take the food to the disciples and whisper: «We have kept theirs aside... for when they awake.»

Then silence envelops the house once again. Perhaps the reapers, who have worked since dawn, are lying on their beds to rest during these hours when it

would be impossible to remain in the fields in the scorching sun. The disciples also are dozing... And doves and sparrows are also resting... Only the swallows keep darting indefatigably, and their swift flights write azure words in the sky and shadowy words on the white threshing-floor...

The little fellow seen a short time ago, who is now beautiful in his very short shirt, the only garment he has on in this torrid hour, puts his little dark head out of the kitchen door, watches closely, and comes forward cautiously with his tender little feet aching on the hot ground. His loose little shirt almost slips off his plump shoulders. He reaches the disciples and tries to step over them to go and look at Jesus once again. But his little legs are too short to get over the sturdy bodies of adults, and he stumbles falling on Matthias who awakes and sees the little face of the mortified child, ready to cry. He smiles and understanding the reason for the little fellow's manoeuvre, he says: «Come here, I will put you between Jesus and myself. But you must be silent and still. Let Him sleep, because He is tired.»

And the child sits down happily, adoring Jesus' beautiful face. He looks at Him, studies Him, and is dying to caress Him and touch His golden hair. But Matthias is vigilant smiling and does not allow him. The child then asks in a low voice: «Does He always sleep like that?»

«Always like that» replies Matthias.

«Is He tired? Why?»

«Because He walks and talks so much.»

«Why does He talk and walk?»

«To teach children to be good and to love the Lord to go to Heaven with Him.»

«Up there? How does one do that? It's far...»

«Your soul, do you know what a soul is?»

«No!»

«It is the nicest thing we have, and...»

«More than our eyes? My mummy says that my eyes are two stars. Stars are beautiful, you know?!»

The disciple smiles and replies: «It is more beautiful than the little stars of your eyes, because a good soul is more beautiful than the sun.»

«Oh! Where is it? Where have I got it?»

«Here. In your little heart. And it hears and sees everything and it never dies. And when one is never bad and dies as a just person, one's soul flies up there, with the Lord.»

«With Him?» and the child points at Jesus.

«With Him.»

«But has He got a soul?»

«He has soul and divinity. Because that Man you are looking at is God.»

«How do you know? Who told you?»

«The angels did.»

The boy, who was sitting leaning on Matthias, cannot take in the news quietly, and he jumps to his feet asking: «Have you seen the angels?» and he looks at Matthias opening his big eyes wide. The news is so astonishing that he forgets Jesus for a moment and thus he does not see that He has half-opened His eyes, awakened by the boy's exclamation. Jesus closes His eyes once again smiling and turns His head round to the other side.

«Be quiet! See? You are waking Him up... I will send you away.»

«I'll be good. But what are the angels like? When did you see them?» His voice is a whisper again.

And Matthias patiently tells the boy, who is sat again in an ecstasy on his chest, what happened on Christmas Night. And he patiently replies to all the boy's questions: «Why was He born in a stable? Had He no home? Was He so poor that He could not find a house? Has He got a house now? Has He no Mother? Where is His Mother? Why does She leave Him all alone, since She knows that they wanted to kill Him? Does She not love Him?...» A hail of questions and one of answers. And the last one – to which Matthias, replies: «His holy Mother loves Her Divine Son very much, but She makes a sacrifice of Her sorrow for letting Him go about, so that men may be saved. And to console Herself She considers that there are still good men capable of loving Him» – brings about this reply: «Does She not know that there are good children who love Him?

Where is She? Tell me, because I will go and say to Her: “Do not weep. I will give all my love to Your Son.” What do you think? Will She be pleased?»

«So much, my child» says Matthias kissing him.

«And will He be glad?»

«Yes, very much. You will tell Him when He awakes.»

«Oh! yes!... But when will He awake?» The boy is anxious...

Jesus can resist no longer. He turns round, with His eyes wide open and a bright smile, and He says: «You have already told Me, because I have heard everything. Come here, child.»

Oh! the boy does not need to be told twice and he throws himself on Jesus, caressing and kissing Him, touching His forehead, His golden eyebrows and eyelids with his little finger, looking at himself in His blue eyes, rubbing himself against His soft beard and silky hair, repeating at each discovery: «How lovely You are! Lovely! Lovely!» Jesus and Matthias smile.

Then as the others wake up, because the boy is not so careful now about making too much noise, the disciples and apostles smile seeing such an accurate examination by the little man in the bud, halfnaked, plump, who moves blissfully up and down Jesus' body, scanning it from head to foot and ends up by saying: «Turn round!» and he explains why: «to see Your wings» and when he is disappointed he asks: «Why have You not got them.?»

«I am not an angel, My child.»

«But You are God! How can You be God if You are not full of wings? How will You be able to go up to Heaven?»

«I am God. Just because I am God I do not need wings. I do what I want and I can do everything.»

«Well, then, make my eyes like Yours. They are beautiful.»

«No. I gave you the ones you have and I like them as they are. Ask Me, instead, to make your soul just, so that you can love Me more and more.»

«You gave me that as well, so You must like it as it is» replies the little one with childish logic.

«Yes, I like it very much now because it is innocent. But while your eyes will

always be the hue of ripe olives, your soul may change from white to black, if you are bad.»

«No, not bad. I love You and I want to do what the angels said when You were born: “Peace to God in Heaven and glory to men of good will”» says the boy mistaking, which makes the adults guffaw, and the little fellow mortified becomes dumb.

But Jesus comforts him while correcting him: «God is always Peace, My child. He is the Peace. But the angels were giving Him glory because the Saviour was born and they were giving men *the first rule to obtain the peace*, which was to derive from My birth: “to have good will”. The one you want.»

«Yes, give me it. Put it here where that man said that I have my soul» and with his forefingers he beats his little chest several times.

«Yes, My little friend. What is your name?»

«Michael!»

«The name of the powerful Archangel. Well, I give good will to you, Michael. And may you be a confessor of the true God, saying to persecutors what your angelic patron said: “Who is like God?” May you be blessed now and always» and He imposes His hands on him.

But the little one is not convinced. He says: «No, kiss me here. On my soul. And Your blessing will go into it and will remain closed in it» and he uncovers his chest to be kissed without anything being interposed between his body and Jesus' divine lips.

All those who are present smile and are moved at the same time. And quite rightly! The wonderful faith of the innocent child, who has gone to Jesus, some may say by instinct, but I say: urged by his soul, is really touching, and Jesus points it out saying: «Eh! if everybody had the heart of a child!...»

Hours have gone by in the meanwhile. The house becomes busy again. The voices of women, children and men can be heard. And a mother calls: «Michael! Michael! Where are you?» and she appears at the door and with fear in her eyes she looks at the low well with a dreadful thought in her heart.

«Be not afraid, woman. Your son is with Me.»

«Oh! I was afraid... He likes to play with water so much...»

«And in fact he came to the Living Water that descends from Heaven to give Life to men.»

«He has troubled You... But he slipped away so silently that I did not hear him...» says the woman apologising.

«Oh! no! He has not disturbed Me. He comforted Me! Children never grieve Jesus.»

Men and other women approach Jesus. The head of the family says: «Come in and take some food. And forgive us if we did not make You the master of our house the first moment we saw You...»

«I have nothing to forgive you. I have been very comfortable here. I feel honoured by your respect. We had food, and your well is cool and your hay soft. More than what is necessary for the Son of Man. I am not a Syrian satrap.»

And Jesus followed by His apostles enters the wide kitchen to take some food while the men prepare the threshing-floor to make room for those who are already coming from all around to hear the Master, and others are busy preparing food and drinks and skinning a little lamb to be given to the evangelizers as provisions for their journey. Some women bring eggs and butter, which brings a protest from Peter who says rightly that butter cannot be carried in their haversacks as it would melt immediately in the heat. But jugs can be useful... And the women fill one with butter, which they cover and lower into the well to keep as cool as possible.

Jesus thanks them and would like to limit the offerings. Impossible! He wastes His breath. More presents arrive from everywhere and everyone apologises for giving so little...

Peter whispers: «It is well seen that the shepherds have been here. Reclaimed ground... good ground.»

The threshing-floor is crowded with undaunted people although the day is still warm and the last rays of the sun shine on the floor.

Jesus begins to speak: «Peace be with you! I will not repeat what you already know, as I see that the doctrine of the Master of Israel is already known here, through the work of My good disciples. I leave to them the glory and the task of teaching you and of doing so more and more in order to make you perfectly certain that I am the One Promised by God, and that My Word is from God.»

«And Your miracles are from God, may You be blessed!» shouts a woman from the middle of the crowd, and many turn round to look in her direction. The woman lifts up in her arms a ruddy smiling boy and shouts: «Master, this is little John whom You cured at the Clear Water. The little boy with fractured legs whom no doctor could cure and I brought to You with faith and You cured him and You held him in Your lap.»

«I remember, woman. Your faith deserved the miracle.»

«My faith has increased, Master. All my relatives believe in You. Go, son, and thank the Saviour. Let him go to Him...» begs the woman.

And the crowds part to let him through and he runs towards Jesus, his arms outstretched to embrace Him. And they embrace each other in the middle of the hosannas and comments of the townsfolk and of foreigners, because the country people are already aware of the fact and are not surprised.

Jesus resumes speaking holding the boy by the hand.

«And thus a grateful mother has confirmed My Nature and the power of faith in the heart of God, Who never disappoints the trustful just requests of His children.

I ask you to remember Judas Maccabee when he appeared on this plain to study the formidable encampment of Gorgias, which was five thousand foot and one thousand cavalry strong, all trained to battle, well protected by armour and weapons and war towers. Judas was watching with his three thousand men who had neither shields nor swords, and he could perceive fear insinuate itself into the hearts of his soldiers. He then spoke, strong of the right that was approved of by God, because it aimed not at abuse of power, but at defence of their invaded and desecrated Fatherland. And he said: “Do not be afraid of their numbers, and do not flinch at their attack. Remember how our ancestors were delivered at the Red Sea, when Pharaoh was pursuing them in force.” And after reviving their faith in the power of God, Who is always on the side of just people, he taught them how to obtain assistance. He said: “Now let us raise our voices to Heaven, and the Lord will have mercy on us, and remembering His covenant with our ancestors, He will destroy this army confronting us today, and all the nations will know for certain that there is a Saviour Who delivers Israel.”

Now, I will show you two capital points to have God with you, to assist you in just undertakings. The first: to have Him as your ally, you must have the upright

souls of our ancestors. *Remember the holiness and prompt obedience of the patriarchs to the Lord, whether the request was of little or great importance.* Remember with what loyalty they remained faithful to the Lord. We complain bitterly in Israel that the Lord is no longer as benign to us as He was in the past. But has Israel the spirit of her ancestors? Who broke and repeatedly breaks off the alliance with the Father?

The second capital thing to have God with you: *humility.* Judas Maccabee was a great Israelite, he was a valiant soldier. But he does not say: “I will destroy that army today and the nations will know that I am the saviour of Israel.” No. He says: “And the Lord will destroy that army confronting us, because we are not able to do that, weak as we are.” Because God is a Father and He takes care of His little ones and to prevent them from perishing, He sends His powerful formations to fight the enemies of His children with superhuman weapons. When God is with us, who can defeat us? Always bear that in mind, now and even more in future, when they will endeavour to beat you, and not in matters of relative importance, such as a national battle, but in things of wider interest both in time and consequences, concerning your souls. *Do not be overcome by dismay or pride. They are both harmful. God will be with you if you are persecuted because of My Name and He will give you strength in persecutions. God will be with you if you are humble, if you admit that by yourselves you can do nothing, whereas you can do everything if you are united to the Father.*

Judas does not show off adorning himself with the title of Saviour of Israel. But he gives that title to the Eternal Father. *In fact men busy themselves in vain, if God does not assist their efforts. Whereas he wins without bustling about, who trusts in the Lord, Who knows when it is right to reward people with victories, and when it is just to punish with defeats. Foolish is the man who wants to judge God, advising or criticising Him.* Can you imagine an ant, which watching the work of a marble-cutter, should say: “You are no good at doing that. I could do better and quicker than you”? He who wants to teach God, cuts the same poor figure. And to his ridiculous figure *he adds ingratitude and arrogance,* forgetting what he is: a creature, and what God is: the Creator. Now if God created such a perfect creature, who may think that he can advise God Himself, what will the perfection of the Author of all creatures be like? That simple thought should be enough to abase *pride,* destroying that wicked satanic plant, *the parasite which creeps into man's intellect and destroys it, and supplants, suffocates and kills every good tree, every virtue which makes man great on the Earth,* really great, not because of great wealth or coronets, but because of

justice and supernatural wisdom, and makes him happy in Heaven forever and ever.

And let us consider another good piece of advice given to us by the great Judas Maccabee and by the events of that day in this plain. When they joined battle, Judas' troops, with whom God was, defeated and routed their enemies, pursuing some as far as Gezer, Azotus, Idumaea and Jamnia, as history tells us, and killing some by the sword, leaving over three thousand men dead in the fields. But Judas said to his warriors excited with the victory: "Never mind the booty, for we have another battle ahead of us. Gorgias and his forces are in the mountains not far from us. We must go on fighting against our enemies and defeat them completely and then we can collect the booty at leisure." And they did so. And they won a great victory and they carried off rich booty, and they returned chanting praises to God because "He is good, and His mercy is everlasting."

Man also, every man, is like the fields around the holy city of the Judaeans. He is surrounded by external and internal enemies, who are all cruel and anxious to join battle with the holy city of each man: that is, with his soul, and to do so all of a sudden, to take it by surprise by means of numberless tricks and destroy it. *Passions*, which Satan cultivates and instigates, and which man does not watch with all his will to check, as *they are dangerous if one does not bridle them*, whereas they are harmless if one keeps a check on them as on a robber enchained, and the world that from outside conspires with passions through the allurements of the flesh, of wealth, of pride, are very much like the powerful armies of Gorgias, armoured, equipped with war towers, skilled bowmen, fast cavalymen, always ready to attack under Evil's orders. But what can Evil do if God is with the man who wants to be just? *Man may suffer and be wounded, but his freedom and life will be saved and he will enjoy victory after the good battle.* But that does not happen once only, *but it happens again and again as long as life lasts, or until man divests himself of his humanity and becomes spirit more than body*, a spirit so united to God that arrows, bites, the fire of war can no longer injure him severely, and they fall after striking him superficially, as a drop of water falls on a hard brilliant jasper.

Do not stop to plunder, *do not divert your attention, until you are on the threshold of life*, not of this life on the Earth, but of the *true Life in Heaven*. *Then, having won, you can carry off your booty and go in, and move forward, gloriously, before the King of kings* and say: "I have won. Here is my booty. I

collected it with Your help and my good will and I bless You, Lord, because You are good and Your mercy is everlasting."

This applies to everybody in general. But for you who believe in Me there is another battle lying in wait. Nay, several battles. *The battle against doubt*. The battle against the words you will be told. *And the battle against persecutions*.

I am about to be raised to the place, for which I came from Heaven. That place will frighten you, and will seem to disprove My words. No. Look at the event with spiritual eyes. And you will see that what happens is the confirmation of what I really am. Not the poor king of a poor kingdom. But the King foretold by the prophets, to the foot of Whose only immortal throne, all the nations of the Earth will come, as rivers flow to the ocean, and will say: "We worship You, King of kings and eternal Judge, because through Your holy Sacrifice You have redeemed the world."

Resist doubt. I do not lie. I am He of Whom the prophets speak. Like John's mother a little while ago, raise the remembrance of what I have done for you, and say: "These deeds come from God. He left them with us in memory, as confirmation and assistance to believe, and believe in this very hour." Fight and you will win against doubt that chokes the breath of souls. Fight against the words that you will be told. Remember the prophets and My works. And reply to hostile words with the prophets and the miracles, which you have seen Me work. Be not afraid. *And do not be ungrateful out of fear, being silent about what I have done for you. Fight against persecutions.* But do not fight by persecuting your persecutors, but *by making a heroic confession to those who, with threats of death, will try to convince you to deny Me. Always fight against all your enemies. Against your humanity, your fears, unworthy compromises, utilitarian alliances, pressure, threats, torture, death.*

Death! I am not a leader who says to his people: "Suffer for Me, while I have a good time." No. *I am the first to suffer to set the example for you.* I am not the commander of armies who says to his soldiers: "Fight to defend Me. Die to save My life." No. *I am the first to fight. I will be the first to die, to teach you how to die.* As I have always done what I told people to do, and *preaching poverty, continence, moderation, justice, forgiveness, I have remained poor, chaste, moderate, just, and I have forgiven and will forgive;* as I have done all that, I will do the last thing. *I will teach you how to redeem. I will teach you not by words, but by deeds. I will teach you to obey, by obeying the hardest obedience: the obedience of My death.*

I will teach you to forgive, forgiving in My last torture, as on the straw of My cradle I forgave Mankind for tearing Me from Heaven. I will forgive as I have always forgiven. Everybody. Everybody as far as I am concerned. I will forgive My little enemies, the inert, indifferent, changeable, and My big enemies, who not only grieve Me by being apathetic to My power and desire to save them, but they deeply distress and will distress Me by being deicides. But I will forgive. And as I will not be able to absolve unrepentant deicides, I will still pray, in My final distress, the Father for them... that He may forgive them... as they are intoxicated with a satanic liqueur... I will forgive... And I ask you to forgive in My name. And love. Love as I love, as I love you and will love you forever.

Goodbye. It is growing dark. Let us pray together, and then you may all go back to your homes with the words of the Lord in your hearts, and may they become well-shaped ears of corn for your future hunger, when you will be wishing to hear again your Friend, the Master, your Saviour, and only by elevating your souls to Heaven you will be able to find Him Who loved you more than Himself.

Our Father Who are in Heaven...» and Jesus, with outstretched arms, like a majestic white cross against the dark wall of the northern facade, says the Our Father slowly.

He then blesses with the Mosaic blessing. He kisses the children and blesses them once again. He takes leave and goes northwards, going round the town-walls of Emmaus, without entering the town. The violet hues of twilight slowly absorb the gentle vision of Jesus, Who proceeds more and more towards His destiny.

In the half-dark yard there is the silence of sorrowful peace... Almost of expectation. Then the weeping of little Michael, like the plaintive bleating of a little lamb which is all alone, breaks the spell and tears well up in many eyes while many lips repeat the innocent words of the little boy: «Oh! Why has He gone away? Come back! Come back!... Lord, make Him come back!» And when Jesus disappears completely, there is the desolate ascertainment of reality: «Jesus is no longer here!» In vain his mother tries to comfort little Michael, who is weeping as if he had lost more than his mother, and from her arms he cannot take his eyes off the spot where Jesus disappeared and with his arms outstretched he calls: «Jesus! Jesus!»

... Jesus waits to be at a little distance, then He says: «We shall go to Joppa. The

disciples have worked hard there and the people are awaiting the word of the Lord.»

There is not much enthusiasm for the proposed further prolongation of the road, but Simon Zealot points out that it is a quick journey and on a good road from Joppa to the estates of Nicodemus and Joseph, and John is happy to be going towards the sea. And the others, convinced by such considerations, end up by going more willingly along the road that takes to the sea.

 Jesus says: «You will put here the vision of September 20th 1944: “Jesus and the Gentiles in a seaside-town”, which you will entitle: “At Joppa Jesus speaks to Judas of Kerioth and to some Gentiles”, because the episode took place there after a day of miracles and preaching.»

404. At Joppa Jesus Speaks to Judas of Kerioth and to Some Gentiles.

20th September 1944.

I see Jesus sitting in the inner yard of a house, which is modest although not splendid. He looks very tired. He is sitting on a stone bench near a well with a low parapet, above which a green pergola forms an arch. The bunches of grapes are just beginning to form. The flowers must have fallen off recently and the tiny grapes are like millet-seeds hanging from small green stalks. Jesus has put His right elbow on His right knee and His chin is resting in the hollow of His hand. At times, He lays His folded arm on the edge of the well and His head on His arm, as if He wished to be more comfortable: as if He wanted to sleep. His hair then falls down veiling His tired face, which, when visible, looks pale and grave, framed by curly red-blondish locks.

A woman goes backwards and forwards, her hands covered with flour, and she passes from a room in the house to a smaller room on the other side of the yard where the oven must be. She looks at Jesus every time she passes, but she does not disturb Him. It must be almost evening, because the sunbeams skim the top of the terraced roof more and more faintly and soon vanish completely.

About a dozen doves are about to descend cooing to the yard for a last meal. They wheel round Jesus, as if they wished to ascertain who is the stranger and distrustfully dare not land on the ground. Jesus forgets His worries and smiles, He stretches out one hand, palm upwards, and says: «Are you hungry? Come» as if He were speaking to human beings. The most daring one alights on His hand, followed by two more. Jesus smiles: «I have nothing» He says in reply to their cooing requests. He then calls in a loud voice: «Woman? Your doves are hungry. Have you any corn for them?»

«Yes, Master. It's in the sack under the porch. I'll come at once.»

«Never mind. I will give it to them. I like doing it.»

«They will not come to You. They do not know You.»

«Oh! They are on My shoulders and even on My head!...»

Jesus is in fact walking with a strange crest: a leaden dove, the breast of which is so iridescent that it seems a precious breastplate.

The woman looks out of the door incredulously and exclaims: «Oh!»

«See? Doves are better than men, woman. They perceive who loves them. Men... do not.»

«Master, forget about what happened. Only a few people hate You. The others, if they do not all love You, at least respect You.»

«Oh! I will not lose heart because of that. I only wish to point out to you that animals are often better than men.»

Jesus has opened the sack, He puts His long hand into it and pulls out some golden corn, which He places in the folded edge of His mantle. He closes the sack again and returns to the yard, defending Himself from the intrusive doves that want to help themselves. He unfolds His mantle and scatters the corn on the floor and laughs at the bustle and brawl of the greedy birds. The meal is soon over. The doves drink from a hollow dish near the well and look at Jesus again.

«Go now. I have nothing else.»

They fly about for a little while landing on Jesus' shoulders and knees and then go back to their nests. Jesus becomes engrossed in meditation again.

There is a loud knocking at the door. The woman rushes to open. It is the

disciples.

«Come» says Jesus. «Have you given the money to the poor?»

«Yes, Master, we have.»

«To the last coin? Remember that what is given to us is not for us, but it is to be given in Charity. We are poor and we live on the mercy of other people. Miserable is the apostle who exploits his mission for human ends!»

«And if one day we are without bread and we are accused of infringing the Law because we imitate sparrows, eating grains of corn as they do, what shall we do?»

«Have you ever lacked anything, Judas? Anything essential since you have been with Me? Have you ever fallen exhausted along the road?»

«No, Master.»

«When I said to you: “Come” did I promise you comfort and riches? And speaking to those who listen to Me, have I ever said that I will give “My disciples” profit on the Earth?»

«No, Master.»

«Well, Judas? Why have you changed so much? Do you not know, do you not realise that your dissatisfaction and your indifference grieve Me? Do you not see that your discontent affects also your brothers? Why, Judas, My friend, are you forsaking Me now, whereas you have been called to so great a destiny, and you came to My love and to My Light with so much enthusiasm?»

«Master, I am not forsaking You. I am the one who takes most care of You, of Your interests, of Your success. I would like to see You triumph everywhere, believe me.»

«I know. You want that in a human way. It is a great thing. But I do not want that, Judas, My friend... I have come for something by far greater than a human triumph and a human kingdom... I have not come to give My friends the crumbs of a human triumph. But I have come to give you a great, substantial, abundant reward, a reward that is no longer a reward, as it is so complete: *it is participation in My eternal Kingdom, it is union in the rights of the children of God...* Oh! Judas!

Why are you not elated by this sublime inheritance, *which one achieves through*

renunciation, but which knows no decline?

Come closer to Me, Judas. See? We are alone. The others have understood that I wanted to speak to you, the dispenser of My... riches, of the alms that the Son of Man, the Son of God receives to give them, in the name of God and of Man, to man. And they have withdrawn into the house. We are alone, Judas, in this sweet hour of the evening, when our hearts fly to our remote homes, to our mothers, who certainly think of us, while preparing their solitary supper, and they caress with their hands the place where we used to sit before this hour of God, when His Most Holy Will took us to make Him loved in spirit and truth.

Our mothers! Mine, so holy and pure, Who is so fond of you all and prays for you, the friends of Her Jesus... Mine, Who has but this peace, in the anxiety of Her Maternity of Mother of the Christ: to know that I am surrounded by your love... Do not disappoint, do not injure that heart of a Mother, My dear friends. Do not break it through any evil action of yours! Your mother, Judas. Your mother, who the last time we passed through Kerieth could not stop blessing Me and wanted to kiss My feet, because she is happy that her Judas is in the Light of God, and she used to say to Me: "Oh! Master! Make my Judas holy! What does the heart of a mother seek, but the welfare of her child? And which welfare is better than the eternal Good?" In fact! And which welfare, Judas, is there greater than the one to which I want to lead you all, and *which one reaches following My Way?* Your mother is a holy woman, Judas. A true daughter of Israel. I did not allow her to kiss My feet. Because you are My friends and because in each of your mothers, in every good mother, I see Mine, Judas. And I would like you to see in your mothers Mine, with Her tremendous destiny of Co-Redeemer, and I would like you not to wish to kill Her because... because you would feel that you were killing your own.

Judas, do not weep. Why weep? If you feel no remorse in your heart with regard to your mother or Mine, why shed those tears? Come here, rest your head on My shoulder and tell your Friend your anxiety. Have you done wrong? Do you feel you are about to do wrong? Oh! do not remain alone! Defeat Satan with the help of Him Who loves you. I am Jesus, Judas. I am the Jesus Who cures diseases and expels demons. I am the Jesus Who saves... and Who loves you so much, that He worries at seeing you so enfeebled. I am the Jesus Who teaches to forgive seventy times seven. But I, personally, forgive you not seventy, but seven hundred, seven thousand times... *and there is no fault, Judas, there is no fault, Judas, there is no fault, Judas, that I do not forgive, that I do not forgive,*

that I do not forgive, if the repentant culprit says to Me: "Jesus, I have sinned." Even less: *if he only says: "Jesus!"* And even less: *if he only looks at Me imploringly.* And the first faults that I forgive, do you know, My friend, whom I forgive them? *The most guilty and the most repentant.* And do you know which are the very first ones that I forgive? *Those committed against Me.*

Judas?... Can you not find one word to reply to your Master?... Is your anguish so severe that it makes words die on your lips? Are you afraid that I may denounce you? Be not afraid! I have been longing for such a long time to speak to you thus, holding you on My heart, like twins in a cradle, born of the same mother, almost one flesh only, two babies who have sucked in turn the same warm nipple, each savouring his brother's saliva together with his mother's sweet milk. I now have you and I will not let you go away until you tell Me that I have cured you. Be not afraid, Judas. *I want your confession.* But your companions will think that this is a friendly conversation, because after it our faces will beam so much with reciprocal peace and love. And I will get them to believe so more and more, by holding you against My chest at supper this evening, dipping in the dish My own bread for you and offering it to you as to a favourite, and you will be the first to whom I will give the cup, after giving thanks to God. You will be the king of the banquet, Judas. And you will really be so. You will be the Bride of the Groom, o soul that I love, *if you become clean and free, depositing your dust in My purifying lap.*

Are you not going to speak to tell Me your grief?»

«You have spoken so kindly to me... of my mother... of home... of Your love... A moment of weakness... I am so tired!... And I thought that You had not loved me thus for some time...»

«No. It is not so. Only one thing of what you said is true, and that is that you are tired. But you are not tired of the road, of dust, of the sun, of mud, of crowds. *You are tired of yourself.* Your soul is tired of your body and of your mind. So tired that it will end extinguished by deadly tiredness. Poor soul, which I called to eternal brightness! Poor soul, which is aware of My love for you and reproaches you for tearing it away from My love! Poor soul, which reproaches you in vain – *as in vain I caress you* – for acting underhandedly with your Master. But it is not you who acts. *It is he who hates you and Me.* That is why I said to you: "Do not remain alone." Now, listen. You know that I spend most of My nights in prayer. If one day you should feel the courage of being a man and you wanted to be Mine, come to Me when your companions are sleeping. Stars,

flowers, birds are good wise witnesses. And they are discreet and compassionate. They are struck with horror at the crime committed in their presence, but they do not utter any word to say to men: "This man is the Cain of his brother." Have you understood, Judas?»

«Yes, Master, I have. But believe Me: I am only tired and deeply moved. I love You with all my heart and...»

«All right. That is enough.»

«Will You give me a kiss, Master?»

«Yes, Judas. I will give you a kiss now and many in future...»

Jesus draws a heavy sigh, with grief. But He kisses Judas on the cheek. He then takes his head between the palms of His hands, and holding it tight, in front of Himself, only a few inches from His face, gazes at him, scrutinises him, pierces him with His magnetic eyes. And Judas, a wretched miserable man, does not turn a hair. He seemingly remains impassive while being examined. He only grows wan and closes his eyes for a moment. And Jesus kisses his closed eyelids, his lips and then his heart, bending His head to look for the heart of His disciple... and He says: «There you are: to dispel haze, to make you feel Jesus' kindness and fortify your heart.» He then lets him go and directs His steps towards the house, followed by Judas.

«You have come at the right moment, Master! Everything is ready. We were waiting only for You» says Peter.

«Well. I was speaking to Judas about many things... Is that right, Judas? We will also have to see to that poor old man whose son was killed.»

«Ah!» Judas leaps at the good opportunity to recover completely and divert the suspicion of the others, if they had any. «Ah! You know, Master? We were stopped today by a group of Gentiles along with Jews of the Roman colonies in Greece. They asked many questions. We replied as best we could. But we certainly did not convince them. However they were kind to us and gave us much money. Here it is, Master. We will be able to do much good with it.» And Judas produces a large purse of soft leather that gives a silvery sound when laid on the table. It is the size of a child's head.

«All right, Judas. You will distribute the money impartially. What did the Gentiles want to know?»

«Information on future life... whether man has a soul and whether it is immortal. They mentioned the names of their masters. But... what could we say?»

«You should have told them to come.»

«We told them. Perhaps they will come.»

They continue to eat. Judas is near Jesus Who gives him some bread dipped into the sauce in the dish containing some roast meat.

They are eating small black olives, when they hear someone knock at the door. And shortly afterwards the landlady enters saying: «Master, You are wanted.»

«Who are they?»

«Strangers.»

«But it's not possible!», «The Master is tired!», «He has been walking and speaking all day!», «In any case! Gentiles in the house! Now then!». The Twelve are in a turmoil, like a beehive which has been disturbed.

«Hush! Peace! It does not trouble Me to listen to those who look for Me. It is relaxation to Me.»

«It might be a trap! At this time of the day!...»

«No. It is not. Be calm and have a rest. I rested while waiting for you. I will go. I will not ask you to come with Me... although... although I tell you that it is to the Gentiles that you will have to take your Judaism, which will be nothing but Christianity. Wait for Me here.»

«Are You going alone! No! Never!» says Peter standing up.

«Stay where you are. I am going alone.»

He goes out. He looks out of the main door. In the twilight there are many men waiting for Him.

«Peace be with you. Do you want Me?»

«Hail, Master» replies an old imposing man. He is wearing a Roman garment that shows under a short round mantle with hood on his head. «We spoke to your disciples today. But they could not tell us much. We would like to speak to You.»

«Are you the ones of the rich offering? Thank you on behalf of the poor of

God.» Jesus turns round towards the landlady and says: «Woman, I am going out with these people. Tell My disciples to come and meet Me near the seashore because, if I am right, these people are merchants of the trade centre...»

«And seafarers, Master. You are right.»

They all go out together on to the main road, which is bright in the moonlight.

«Have you come from afar?» Jesus is in the middle of the group and beside Him there is the old man who spoke previously, a handsome old man with a sharp Latin profile. On the other side there is another elderly man, whose features are clearly Jewish. Around them there are two or three thin people with olive complexion, lively and somewhat ironical eyes, and then some sturdier people of different ages: about a dozen people all together.

«We come from the Roman colonies in Greece and Asia. Some of us are Jews, some Gentiles... That is why we dared not come... But we were assured that You do not despise Gentiles... as other people do... The observant Judaeans, I mean, those of Israel, because elsewhere also Judaeans are not so severe. In fact I, a Roman, am married to a Judaeans from Lycaonia, whereas this gentleman, a Jew from Ephesus, is married to a Roman woman.»

«I do not despise anybody... But we must be indulgent to those who cannot yet consider that: As there is one only Creator, all men are of one blood.»

«We know that You are great among philosophers. And what You say confirms it. You are great and good.»

«*He is good who does good things.* Not who speaks well.»

«You speak well and do good things. So You are good.»

«What did you want to know from Me?»

«Today, forgive us, Master, if we annoy You with our inquisitiveness. But it is a good inquisitiveness because it seeks the Truth with love... Today we wanted to learn from Your disciples the truth concerning a doctrine, which was already mentioned by ancient philosophers of Greece and which You, so we are told, are now preaching once again, making it more extensive and beautiful. Eunice, my wife, spoke to some Judaeans who had heard You, and she repeated Your words to me. Eunice, You know, is Greek and learned and she knows the words of the wise men of her country. She found a resemblance between Your words and those of a great Greek philosopher. And Your words have reached also Ephesus.

And as we came to this port, some on business and some to celebrate the rite, we found ourselves among friends and we talked. Business does distract people from thinking also of other higher matters. After filling our emporia and holds, we have time to resolve our doubt. You say that a soul is eternal. Socrates said that It is immortal. Do You know the words of the Greek master?»

«No. I did not study in the schools of Rome and Athens. But tell Me. I will understand you just the same. I am acquainted with the thought of the Greek philosopher.»

«Socrates, contrary to what we Romans believe, and also to what your Sadducees think, states and maintains that man has a soul and that it is immortal. Consequently he says that death is nothing but liberation for the soul that passes from prison to a free place, where it joins those whom it loved and where it meets the wise men with whose wisdom it was acquainted, and great people, heroes, poets, and where it no longer finds injustice or sorrow. There is instead eternal happiness in a peaceful residence open to the immortal souls which lived in justice. What do You say, Master?»

«I solemnly tell you that the Greek master, although in the error of a false religion, was stating the truth saying that the soul is immortal. *As a searcher after truth and a lover of Virtue, he heard the Voice of the unknown God whisper in the depth of his soul: the Voice of the True God, of the Only God: the Most High Father from Whom I come to take men to the Truth.* Man has a soul, One, True, Eternal, Mistress, worthy of reward and of punishment. It is entirely his. Created by God it is destined in God's Thought to go back to God. You, Gentiles, devote yourselves too much to the cult of your bodies. The human body is really a wonderful work, on which there is the mark of the eternal Finger. You admire your minds too much; man's mind is a jewel enclosed in the coffer of his head from which it sends forth its sublime beams. A great celestial gift of God Creator, Who made you according to His Thought with regard to your figure, that is, a perfect work of organs and members, and He gave you His likeness with His Thought and Spirit. *But the perfection of the likeness is in the Spirit.* Because God has no members or dull flesh, as He is not subject to sensuality or incentive of lust. *But He is a most pure Spirit, He is eternal, perfect, immutable, indefatigable in acting, continuously reviving in His works, which He paternally adapts to the ascensional march of His creature.* The spirit, created in all men by the same Source of power and bounty, knows no variation of the original perfection, but knows many of them after it is infused in the

body. *One only is the uncreated and most perfect Spirit, and it has always been such. Three are the spirits that were created perfect and...*»

«You are one, Master.»

«Not I. *In My body I have the divine Spirit that was not created, but was generated by the Father through exuberance of Love. And I have the soul created for Me by the Father, as I am, now, the Man. A perfect soul as befits the Man God. But I am speaking of other spirits.*»

«Which, then?»

«*The two first parents from whom the race descends; they were created perfect and then they voluntarily fell into imperfection. The third one, created for the delight of God and of the Universe, is too superior to the possibilities of thought and faith of the present world to be pointed out to you. The spirits, as I was saying, created by the same Source with the same degree of perfection, are subject, through their own will and merit, to a double metamorphosis.*»

«So You admit a second life?»

«*There is but one life. In it the soul, which was originally made in God's likeness, passes, through justice faithfully practiced in everything, to a more perfect likeness, I would say, to a second creation of itself, whereby it evolves towards a double likeness to its Creator, becoming capable of possessing holiness, which is perfection of justice and likeness of children to the Father. It is to be found in the blessed souls, that is in those who your Socrates says live in Hades. Whereas I say that when Wisdom will have spoken its words and signed them with its blood, they will be the blessed souls of Paradise, that is, of the Kingdom of God.*»

«And where are they now?»

«In expectation.»

«Of what?»

«Of the Sacrifice. Of Forgiveness. Of Liberation.»

«They say that the Messiah will be the Redeemer, and that You are such... Is it true?»

«It is true. It is I Who am speaking to you.»

«So, You will have to die? Why, Master? The world is in such great need of Light, and You want to leave it?»

«You, a Greek, are asking Me this? You, who are dominated by Socrates' words?»

«Master, Socrates was a just man. You are holy. Consider how much the Earth needs holiness.»

«It will be raised to the ten thousandth power for each sorrow, each wound and drop of My Blood.»

«By Jove! Never was there a Stoic greater than You, as You do not just preach the contempt of life, but You are preparing Yourself to throw it away.»

«*I do not despise life. I love it as the most useful thing to buy the salvation of the world.*»

«But You are too young, Master, to die!»

«Your philosopher says that what is holy is dear to the gods, and you said that I am holy. If I am holy I must long to go back to the Holiness from Which I came. So never young enough not to have such longing. Socrates also says that he who is holy loves to do things pleasant to the gods. What is more pleasant than restoring to the embrace of the Father the children whom sin had banished, and giving man peace with God, the source of all wealth?»

«You say that You do not know Socrates' words. How come then, that You know the ones You have spoken?»

«I know everything. *The thoughts of men, when they are good thoughts, are nothing but the reflection of a thought of Mine. When a thought is not good, it is not Mine, but I have read it in the succession of times and I knew, I know and will know, when it was, is and will be spoken. I know.*»

«Lord, come to Rome, the light of the world. You are surrounded by hatred here. You will be surrounded by veneration there.»

«It would surround man, not the Master of the supernatural. *I have come for the supernatural. I must bring it to the children of the People of God, although they are the most stubborn against the Word.*»

«So Rome and Athens will not have You?»

«They will have Me. Be not afraid. They will have Me. Those who want Me will have Me.»

«But if they are going to kill You...»

«The spirit is immortal. The spirit of every man is immortal. Will Mine not be so, the Spirit of the Son of God? I will come with My active Spirit... I will come... I can see numberless crowds and the Houses erected in My Name... I am everywhere... I will speak in cathedrals and in hearts... My evangelization will know no rest... The Gospel will travel all over the Earth... all good people towards Me... and there... I go by at the head of My multitude of saints and I lead it to Heaven. Come to the Truth...»

«Oh! Lord! Our souls are enveloped in formulae and errors. How can we open the doors to them?»

«I will unlock the doors of Hell, I will open the doors of your Hades and of My Limbo. And will I not be able to open yours? Say: "I want it" and like locks made with wings of butterflies they will collapse as if they were pulverised at the passing of My Ray.»

«Who will come in Your Name?»

«See that man who is coming here with the other fellow who is little more than a teenager? They will come to Rome and to the world. And many more with them. As solicitous as they are now, for My love that spurs them and gives them no rest but beside Me, they will come, for the sake of those redeemed by My Blood, to gather you together and lead you to the Light. Peter! John! Come here. I think I have finished and I can be with you. Have you anything else to tell Me?»

«Nothing else, Master. We will go away taking Your words with us.»

«May they germinate within you with eternal roots. Go. Peace be with you.»

«Hail, Master.»

And the vision ends...

Jesus says also to me: «Are you exhausted? A laborious dictation. A dictation rather than a vision. But the subject is wanted by certain people. Who? You will know on My Day. Now you may go in peace as well.»

Of my own I wish to add that the conversation of Jesus with the Gentiles took place along the sea-front of a seaside-town. In the moonlight one could see very clearly the calm waves lap the rocks of the breakwater of a large port full of ships. I could not mention this before because the group spoke all the time and if I had described the place I would have lost the thread of the conversation. They spoke walking up and down a long stretch of the seafront near the port. The place is solitary as there are no passengers and the seafarers have all gone back to the boats, the red lamps of which can be seen shining like rubies in the night. I do not know which town it is. It is certainly beautiful and important (1).

(1) It is the town of Joppa, as mentioned at the end of Chapter 403.

405. In the Estate of Nicodemus. The Parable of the Two Sons.

29th March 1946.

Jesus arrives there at dawn, when the air is fresh and cool. And the fertile fields of good Nicodemus are beautiful in the early sunshine. They are beautiful notwithstanding that the corn has been cut in many of them and they thus have the tired look of fields after the death of the corn, which in golden piles, or stretched on the ground like corpses, awaits being carried to the threshing-floors. And many other flowers die with the corn: sapphire star-shaped cornflowers, violet snapdragons, the minute corollas of scabiouses, the ephemeral chalice of harebells, the smiling radiant crowns of camomiles and daisies, showy scarlet poppies, and hundreds of other flowers, which star-shaped, in spikelike clusters, in bunches, in radiant crowns were previously smiling where there is now yellowish stubble. But the pain of the ground despoiled of its corn is comforted by the foliage of the fruit trees, which look more and more joyful because of the fruit growing on them with many different hues and on which dew drops, not yet dried by the sun, shine like diamond dust.

Farmers are already busy at their work. They are happy because the hard work of harvest time is almost over. And they sing while cutting, and laugh happily, competing with one another in cutting quicker with the sickle or tying sheaves... There are several groups of well-fed peasants who are happy to work for their good master. At the edges of the fields or behind the reapers, there are children,

widows, old people, waiting to glean and they are waiting peacefully, because they know that there is plenty for everybody, as is customary, «by Nicodemus' order», as a widow explains to Jesus, Who had asked her.

«He watches to ensure that a large number of ears are deliberately not tied in the sheaves, and left for us» she says. «And not satisfied with so much charity, after taking a just quantity of corn in proportion to the seed, he gives out the rest to us. Oh! He does not wait for the Sabbatical year to do that! But he always does that to help the poor with his crops, and he does the same with his olive-trees and vineyards. That is why God blesses him with wonderful harvests. The blessings of the poor are like dew on seeds and flowers, and thus each seed yields more ears and no flower falls before the fruit sets. And he told us that this year the whole lot will be given to us, because this is a year of grace. I do not know to which grace he refers. Unless it is because, as is rumoured among us poor people and among his happy servants... because he is secretly a disciple of Him, Who is said to be the Christ, and preaches one should love the poor, in order to show love to God... Perhaps You know Him, if You are Nicodemus' friend... because friends are generally fond of the same people... Joseph of Arimathea, for instance, is a great friend of Nicodemus, and it is rumoured that he, too, is a friend of the Rabbi... Oh! what have I said! May God forgive me! I have wronged the two good masters of our plain!...» The woman is upset.

Jesus smiles and asks: «Why, woman?»

«Because... Oh! tell me, are You a true friend of Nicodemus and Joseph, or are You one of the Sanhedrin, one of the false friends who would harm those two good people, if they knew for certain that they are friends of the Galilean?»

«Do not worry. I am a true friend of those two good men. But you know many things, woman! How did you get to know them?»

«Oh! we all know! The high classes with hatred; the low ones with love. Because, even if we do not know Him, we love the Christ, we the forlorn ones, whom He only loves and teaches to love. And we tremble for Him... The Judaeans, Pharisees, scribes and priests are so wicked!... But I am scandalising You... Forgive me. My tongue... is the tongue of a woman and cannot keep quiet... But it is because they are the cause of all our sorrows, the powerful ones who oppress us mercilessly, and compel us to fast on days which are not prescribed by the Law, but imposed by the necessity of finding money to pay all the tithes which they, the rich ones, have levied on poor people... And it is

because all our hopes are in the Kingdom of this Rabbi, Who, if He is so good now that He is persecuted, what will He be when He is king?»

«His Kingdom is not of this world, woman. He will have neither palaces nor armies. He will not impose human laws. He will not make donations of money. But He will teach the better ones to do so. And the poor will find not two or ten or one hundred friends among the rich, but all those who believe in the Master will join their wealth together to assist their needy brothers. Because from now on your fellow-creature will no longer be called “neighbour”, but “brother”, in the name of the Lord.»

«Oh!...» The woman is astonished, dreaming of such an era of love. She caresses her children, smiles, then raises her head and says: «So You assure me that I have not wronged Nicodemus... speaking to You? I did it so spontaneously... Your eyes are so kind!... Your countenance so serene!... I don't know... I feel as safe as if I were near an angel of God... That's why I spoke...»

«You have done no harm. Be sure of that. On the contrary, you have praised My friend so highly that I will commend him as well, and he will be dearer to Me than ever... Do you live here?»

«Oh! no, Lord. I come from a village between Lydda and Bethdagon. But when one needs relief, Lord, one runs even if the road is a long one! The winter months... the months of starvation are longer...»

«And eternity is longer than life. People ought to have for their souls the same care they have for their bodies, and run where there are words of life...»

«And that is what I do with the disciples of Rabbi Jesus, the good one, You know? The only good Rabbi of the too many rabbis we have.»

«You do the right thing, woman» says Jesus smiling, but making gestures to Andrew and James of Zebedee, who, are with Him whereas the others have gone towards Nicodemus house, to stop gesticulating to make the woman understand that it is Rabbi Jesus Who is speaking to her.

«Of course I do the right thing. I do not want to be guilty of not loving and believing Him... They say that He is the Christ... I do not know Him. But I want to believe. Because I think that those who refuse to accept Him as such will be in trouble.»

«And supposing His disciples were mistaken?» asks Jesus tempting her.

«That's not possible, Lord. They are too good, humble and poor, to think that they are following a man who is not holy. In any case... I have spoken to people who were cured by Him. Do not commit the sin of not believing, Lord! You would damn Your soul... After all... I think that if we were all mistaken and He were not the promised King, He is certainly holy and a friend of God, if He speaks those words and cures souls and bodies... And it is always a good thing to esteem good people.»

«What you say is true. Persist in your faith... There is Nicodemus...»

«Yes, with the disciples of the Rabbi. In fact they go round the country evangelizing the reapers. Yesterday also we ate their bread.»

Nicodemus, with his tunic tucked up, is coming forward without noticing the Master and he tells the peasants not to pick up any of the ears that have been cut. «We have enough bread for ourselves... Let us give the gift of God to those who have none. And let us give it to them without any fear. A late frost might have destroyed our crops. Not one seed has been lost. Let us give God's bread back to Him by giving it to His unhappy children. And I can assure you that next year's harvest will be even more plentiful, ten times richer, because He said so, "an overflowing measure will be given to those who give."»

The peasants, respectful and happy, listen to their master nodding assent. And Nicodemus, from one field and one group to another, repeats his kind instructions.

Jesus, half-hidden by a curtain of canes near a partition ditch, approves and smiles. The more Nicodemus approaches Him, the more He smiles, as their meeting and the disciple's surprise are now very close at hand.

In fact Nicodemus jumps over the ditch to go into other fields... and becomes petrified before Jesus Who stretches His arms towards him. At last he recovers his power of speech: «Holy Master, how come You are here with me, may You be blessed?»

«To become acquainted with you, if there was any such need, through the words of the most sincere witnesses: those whom you overwhelm with charity...»

Nicodemus is on his knees, prostrated on the ground and also the disciples, led by Stephen and Joseph from Emmaus on the mountains, are on their knees. The peasants and the poor people present understand and they all prostrate themselves venerating the Master, seized with astonishment.

«Stand up. Up to a little while ago I was the Wayfarer who inspired confidence... Continue to consider Me as such. And love Me without any fear. Nicodemus, I sent the ten apostles who are missing, to your house...»

«I spent the night outside to watch that an order was carried out...»

«Yes, and God blesses you for that order. Which voice told you that this year, and not the next one, is a year of grace, for instance?»

«... I do not know... And I know... I am not a prophet. But I am not a fool. And a light from Heaven was added to my intelligence. My Master... I wanted the poor to enjoy the gifts of God, while God is still among the poor... And I dared not hope to have You, to give a sweet flavour and sanctifying power to these crops, to my olive-groves, vineyards and orchards, which will be for the poor children of God, my brothers... But now that You are here, raise Your blessed hand and bless them, so that with the nourishment of the body, the holiness emanating from You may descend into those who will feed on them.»

«Yes, Nicodemus. Yours is a just desire approved of by Heaven.» And Jesus opens His arms to bless.

«Oh! Wait! That I may call the peasants» and with a whistle he whistles three times and the shrill sound spreads in the calm air causing reapers, gleaners and curious people to rush from everywhere. A little crowd...

Jesus opens His arms and says: «Through the power of the Lord, for the desire of his servant, may the grace of health, both of soul and body, descend upon every grain, every grape, olive and fruit and may it prosper and sanctify those who eat of them with good spirit, free from concupiscence and hatred, and willing to serve the Lord by obeying His divine perfect Will.»

«So be it» reply Nicodemus, Andrew, James, Stephen and the other disciples... «So be it» reply the people of the crowd standing up, as they had knelt down to be blessed.

«Stop the work, My friend. I want to speak to them.»

«A gift in a gift. Thank You on their behalf, Master!»

They go into the shade of a thick orchard and wait for the arrival of the ten who had been sent to the house. They in fact arrive panting and disappointed at not finding Nicodemus.

Jesus then begins to speak:

«Peace be with you. I wish to propose a parable to all of you standing here around Me, so that each of you may avail himself of the teaching and of the part that is more suitable to him. Listen.»

A man had two sons. He approached the first one and said: “Son, come and work in your father's vineyard today.” It was a great sign of honour on his father's side. He in fact thought that his son was capable of working where up to then his father had worked. He obviously saw in his son good will, perseverance, capability, experience and love for his parent. But the son, whose mind was somewhat distracted by worldly things and who was afraid of being taken for a servant – Satan makes use of such mirages to avert people from Good – fearing mockery and perhaps also reprisal from his father's enemies, who dared not threaten him but would not have so much respect for the son, replied: “I will not go. I do not feel like it.” The father then went to the other son, saying to him what he had already said to the first one. And the second son replied: “Yes, father, I will go at once.” But what happened? The first son whose mind was honest, after a first moment of weakness in temptation, a moment of rebellion, repented having disgusted his father, and without saying anything went to the vineyard, where he worked all day until late in the evening, and then went back home with peace in his heart, having fulfilled his duty. The second son, instead, untruthful and weak, went out, that is true, but he then wasted his time wandering about the town making useless visits to influential people from whom he hoped to get some benefit. And he said to himself, in his heart: “Father is old and will not leave the house. I will tell him that I obeyed and he will believe me...” But when evening came also for him and he went back home, his tired look of an idle person, his creaseless clothes, and his uncertain way of greeting caused his father to watch him and compare him with his first son. The latter, in fact, had come back tired, dirty, untidy, but jovial and sincere. He looked humble and kind, as if he wished to say to his father, without boasting, that after all he had fulfilled his duty: “I love you truly, so much so, that to make you happy I resisted temptation.” And the comparison spoke clearly to the intelligent father, who embraced his son saying: “May you be blessed because you have understood love!”

In fact, what do you think? Which of the two had loved? You will certainly say: “He who did the will of his father.” And who did it? The first or the second son?»

«The first» replies the crowd by one consent.

«Yes, the first. Also in Israel, and you complain about it, in the eyes of God are not holy those who beat their chests saying “Lord! Lord!”, without being really repentant of their sins in their hearts – in fact their hearts become harder and harder – neither are those holy, who ostentatiously devote rites to be regarded as saints, whereas in private they lack charity and justice. Neither those are holy who rebel against the Will of God Who sends Me, and they contest it as if it were the will of Satan, which will not be forgiven. Those are not the ones who are holy in the eyes of God. But those are holy who acknowledging that everything that God does is well done, accept the Messenger of God and listen to His word in order to be able to do what the Father wants in a better and better way: they are holy and dear to the Most High. I solemnly tell you: ignorant and poor people, publicans and prostitutes will go before many who are called “masters”, “powerful”, “holy”, and they will enter the Kingdom of God. And it will be just. Because John came to Israel to lead her on the ways of Justice and too many in Israel did not believe him – Israel who calls herself “learned and holy” – but publicans and prostitutes did believe him. And I came, and the learned and holy ones do not believe Me, but poor and ignorant people and sinners do believe in Me. And I have worked miracles; and they did not believe even them, neither do they repent for not believing. On the contrary, they hate Me and those who love Me. Well, I say: “Blessed those who can believe in Me and thus do the will of God, in Whom there is eternal salvation.” Increase your faith and persevere. You will possess Heaven, because you knew how to love the Truth. Go. May God be always with you.»

He blesses them and dismisses them and then, walking beside Nicodemus, He goes towards the house of His disciple to rest during the hot hours of the day.

406. At the Estate of Joseph of Arimathea. “If you have as much faith as the size of a mustard seed...”

31st March 1946.

Here also the reapers are working hard. Nay, it would be better to say: the reapers have worked hard. Sickles, in fact, are no longer needed, as not one ear

has been left uncut, the fields being closer to the Mediterranean shores than Nicodemus'. Jesus in fact has not gone to Arimathea, but to Joseph's estate in the plain, towards the sea, and the fields here before harvest time must have looked like another little sea of ears, they are so large.

In the middle of the bare fields there is a low, wide white house: a country house, but well kept. Its four threshing-floors are being filled with sheaves arranged in groups, as soldiers do with baggage-trains when they stop at camps. Numerous carts carry the precious goods from the fields to the threshing-floors, where many men unload them and pile them up, while Joseph moves from one threshing-floor to another, checking that everything is done properly.

From the top of a heap on a cart a peasant announces: «Master, we have finished. All the corn is on your threshing-floors. This is the last cart of the last field.»

«Very well. Unload the cart, unyoke the oxen and take them to the watering place and then to the stables. They have worked hard and deserve a rest. And you all have done a good job and deserve a rest. But the last job will be a light one because kind hearts are relieved by the joy of other people. We shall now get the children of God to come here and we will give them the gift of the Father. Abraham, go and call them» he then says addressing a patriarchal peasant, who is perhaps the first of the peasant servants in Joseph's estate. I think he must be, because I see that the other servants have great respect for the old man, who does not work, but supervises and assists the master with his advice.

And the old man goes... I can see him direct his steps to a very low large building, which is more like a shed than a house, with two huge doors which reach up to the eaves gutter. I think that it is a kind of storehouse where carts and other agricultural implements are kept. He goes in and then comes out followed by a miserable heterogeneous crowd of people of every age... and of every degree of misery. There are emaciated people but without any physical defect, and there are cripples, blind and maimed persons, and people with diseased eyes... Many widows with little orphans around them, and wives of sick men, sad, shabby, feeble through waking and sacrificing themselves to cure their husbands.

They come forward with the typical aspect of poor people going to a place where they will be assisted: with shy countenance, the bashfulness of the honest

poor, but, nevertheless, with a smile which just appears on their lips shading the sadness impressed on their wan faces by days of sorrow, but, nevertheless with a tiny spark of triumph, which is almost a reply to the ruthless obstinacy of destiny during continuous sad days, as if to say: «Today is a feast-day also for us, it is a feast, mirth, relief for us!»

The little ones open their eyes wide before the heaps of sheaves, which are higher than the house, and pointing at them they say to their mothers: «Are they for us? Oh! How lovely!» The old people whisper: «May the Blessed One bless the merciful one!» The beggars, cripples, the blind and maimed people and those with defective sight: «We also shall have bread at last, without having to stretch out our hands begging for it!» And the sick people say to their relatives: «At least we shall be able to follow treatment knowing that you are not suffering because of us. Medicines will do us good, now.» And relatives reply to the sick people: «See? Now you will no longer say that we fast to let you have a morsel of bread. So be happy now!...» And the widows to their little orphans: «Dear children, we will have to bless the Father in Heaven most sincerely, as He acts as your father, and also good Joseph who is His administrator. Now we shall not hear you cry any more because you are hungry, poor children, who have but your mothers to assist you... Poor mothers who have no riches but their hearts...» It is a joyful chorus and sight, but it also makes tears well up in one's eyes...

And when the unhappy crowd is before him, Joseph begins to walk up and down their lines, calling them one by one, asking how many they are in the family, how long have they been widows, or ill and so on... and he takes notes. And for each case he gives instructions to the peasant servants: «Give ten. Give thirty.»

«Give sixty» he says after listening to an almost blind old man who comes up to him with seventeen grandchildren, all under twelve, the children of a son and a daughter of his who died, the former at reaping time the previous year, the latter of childbirth... and the old man says: «her husband consoled himself getting married again after one year, and he sent his five children to me saying that he would see to them. Instead, never one penny!... Now my wife also died and I am left... with these...»

«Give sixty to the old father. And you, father, wait here, later I will give you some clothes for the little ones.»

The servant points out that if they continue to give sixty sheaves every time, there will not be enough corn for everybody...

«And where is your faith? Am I perhaps storing up the sheaves for myself and sharing them out? No. No they are for the children dearest to the Lord. The Lord Himself will see that there is enough for everybody» replies Joseph to the servant.

«Yes, master. But numbers are numbers...»

«And faith is faith. And to show you that faith can do everything, I order you to double the quantities given to the first ones. Let him who had ten have ten more, and who had twenty, twenty more and give the old man one hundred and twenty. Go! Do that!»

The servants shrug their shoulders and carry out the order. And the distribution continues while the amazed beneficiaries rejoice seeing that they are receiving a quantity that exceeds the most optimistic hopes. And Joseph smiles, caressing the little ones who are busy helping their mothers, or he helps the cripples who are arranging their little piles, he helps those who are too old to do so, or the women who are too emaciated, and he has two sick people put to one side to let them have further assistance, as he did the old man with seventeen grandchildren.

The piles which were higher than the house, are now very low, almost on ground level. But everybody has had his share, and an abundant one. Joseph asks: «How many sheaves are there still left?»

«One hundred and twelve, master» reply the servants after counting the remainder.

«Well. You will take...» Joseph glances over the list of names which he had written, and then he says: «You will take fifty and put them aside for seed, because it is holy seed. And the rest will be given one each to every head of the family who is present here. They are exactly sixty-two.»

The servants obey. They take fifty sheaves under a porch and hand out the rest. Now there are no more huge golden piles on the threshing-floors. But on the ground there are sixty-two little heaps, of different sizes, and their owners are busy tying them and loading them on to rudimentary wheelbarrows, or on stunted little donkeys that they untied from a fence at the rear of the house.

Old Abraham, who has been chatting with the main peasant servants, approaches his master along with them and the master asks him: «Well? Have you seen? There was enough for everybody! And with surplus!»

«Master! There is a mystery here! Our fields cannot have yielded all the sheaves that you have distributed. I was born here and I am seventy-eight years old. I have been reaping for sixty-six. And I know. My son is right. Without a mystery we could not have given so much!...»

«But it is a matter of fact that we have given them, Abraham. You were beside me. The sheaves were handed out by the servants. There is no sorcery. It is not a dream. You can still count the sheaves. They are still there, although divided into many lots.»

«Yes, master. But... It is not possible that the fields have yielded so many!»

«And what about faith, my children? What about faith? What shall we do with our faith? Could the Lord belie His servant who made a promise in His Name and for a holy purpose?»

«Then, you have worked a miracle?!» exclaim the servants, ready to sing hosannas.

«I am not the type of man who works miracles. I am a poor man. The Lord worked it. He read my heart and saw two wishes in it: the first one was to lead you to my faith. The second was to give much, so much to these unhappy brothers of mine. God consented to my desires... and He worked. May He be blessed for that!» says Joseph bowing reverently as if he were before an altar...

«And His servant with Him» says Jesus Who has been in hiding hitherto behind the corner of a little house surrounded by a hedge; I do not know whether it is the bakehouse or the oil-mill. And He now appears openly on the threshing-floor, where Joseph is standing.

«My Master and my Lord!!» exclaims Joseph falling on his knees to venerate Jesus.

«Peace to you. I have come to bless you in the name of the Father, and to reward your charity and your faith. I shall be your guest this evening. Do you want Me?»

«Oh! Master! Are You asking me? Only... Only I will not be able to honour You here... I am with servants and peasants... in my country house... I have no fine table-cloths, no butler, no experienced servants... I have no refined food... no choice wines... I have no friends here... It will be a very poor hospitality indeed... But You will understand... Why, my Lord, did You not inform me

beforehand? I would have provided... Hermas was here the day before yesterday with his friends... In fact I made use of them to inform these people, to whom I wanted to give what belongs to God... But Hermas did not say anything to me! If I had known!... Allow me, Master, to give instructions, so that I may try to find a remedy... Why are You smiling thus?» at last asks Joseph, who is in utter confusion with the sudden joy and because of the situation that he considers... a disaster.

«I am smiling at your unnecessary pains. Joseph, what are you looking for? For what you have?»

«What I have? I have nothing.»

«Oh! What a material man you are now! Why are you no longer the spiritual Joseph of a little while ago, when you spoke as a wise man? When you were promising, full of confidence, for your faith and to give faith?»

«Oh! did You hear me?»

«I heard and saw you, Joseph. That laurel hedge is very useful, as from it I could see that what I have sown in you is not dead. That is why I say that you are worrying about trifles. You have no butlers or experienced servants? But where charity is practised, there is God, and where God is, there are His angels. So which house-stewards more experienced than they are do you want? You have no delicious food or choice wines? Which food do you want to give Me, which drink more delicious than the love you had for these people and you have for Me? You have no friends to honour Me? And what about these? Which friends are dearer to the Master, Whose name is Jesus, than the poor and the unhappy? Come on, Joseph! Even if Herod should be converted and he should open his halls to give Me honour and hospitality, in a purified palace and the heads of all the castes were there, I would not have a more select court than this one, to which I also wish to say a word and give a gift. Will you allow Me?»

«Oh! Master! I want everything You want! Tell me.»

«Tell them to gather together, and get the servants also to assemble here. There will always be some bread for us... It is better for them to listen to My word now, rather than run here and there busying themselves with trifles.»

The astonished people crowd around quickly...

Jesus says: «You have realised here that faith can multiply corn when such

desire is based on a desire of love. But do not confine your faith to material necessities. God created the first grain of wheat and since then wheat ears for the bread of men. But God created also Paradise and it awaits its citizens. It was created for those who live according to the Law and remain faithful notwithstanding the sorrowful trials of life. Have faith and you will be able to remain holy with the help of the Lord, just as Joseph was able to allot a double quantity of corn to make you happy twice and confirm his servants in the faith. I solemnly tell you that if man had faith in the Lord, and if it were for a just reason, not even mountains, the rocky bowels of which are rooted in the earth, could resist, and they would shift from one place to another at the order of anyone who has faith in the Lord. Have you faith in God?» He asks addressing everybody.

«Yes, Lord!»

«Who is God according to you?»

«The Most Holy Father, as the disciples of the Christ teach us.»

«And what is Christ to you?»

«The Saviour. The Master. The Holy One!»

«Only that?»

«The Son of God. But we must not say that, because if we do, the Pharisees will persecute us.»

«But do you believe that He is the Son of God?»

«Yes, Lord.»

«Well, increase your faith. Even if you are silent, stones, plants, stars, the ground, everything will proclaim that Christ is the true Redeemer and King. They will proclaim it in the hour of His accession, when He will be in the most holy purple with the wreath of Redemption. Blessed are those who will believe that as from now and will believe even more then, and will have faith in the Christ and consequently eternal life. Have you such unshakeable faith in Christ?»

«Yes, Lord. Tell us where He is, and we will beg Him to increase our faith in order to be blessed as You say.» Not only the poor, but also the servants, the apostles and Joseph take part in the last prayer.

«If you have as much faith as the size of a mustard seed, and you keep the

precious pearl of your faith in your hearts, without allowing any human, or superhuman or wicked thing to take it away from you, each of you will be able to say to that mighty mulberry tree which shades Joseph's well: "Uproot yourself and be transplanted in the waves of the sea."»

«But where is Christ? We are expecting Him to be cured. His disciples did not cure us, but they said: "He can do it." We would like to be cured to be able to work» say the sick and unfit men.

«And do you think that Christ can do it?» asks Jesus making signs to Joseph not to say that He is the Christ.

«We do believe it. He is the Son of God. He can do everything.»

«Yes. He can do everything... and He wants everything!» shouts Jesus stretching out His right arm imperiously and then lowering it as if to swear. And He concludes with a powerful cry: «And let that be done, to the glory of God!»

And He is about to turn round towards the house. But those who have been cured, about twenty people, shout, rush, surround Him in a confusion of hands stretched out to touch, bless, find His hands, garments, to kiss and caress Him. They isolate Him from Joseph, from everybody...

And Jesus smiles, caresses, blesses... He slowly frees Himself, and still followed by the people, He disappears into the house while hosannas rise in the sky, which is becoming violet in the incipient twilight.

407. In the House of Joseph of Arimathea on a Sabbath. John, a Member of the Sanhedrin.

2nd April 1946.

Joseph of Arimathea is resting in a half-lit room, because all the curtains have been lowered as a protection from the sun. There is deathlike silence in the entire house. Joseph is dozing in a low seat covered with mats... A servant enters, he goes towards his master and touches him to wake him. Joseph opens his sleepy eyes and looks at the servant inquisitively.

«Master, your friend John is here...»

«My friend John?! How is he here if the Sabbath is not yet over?!»

Joseph has woken up with a start, surprised at the visit of a member of the Sanhedrin on a Sabbath. And he orders: «Let him come in at once.»

The servant goes out and, while waiting, Joseph walks pensively up and down the semi-dark cool room...

«May God be with you, Joseph!» says John, the member of the Sanhedrin we already saw at the first banquet offered to Jesus at Arimathea, and also in Lazarus' house at last Passover, always as a person not hostile to Jesus, although not a disciple.

«And with you, John! But... as I know that you are just, I am astonished at seeing you before sunset...»

«That's true. I have infringed the Sabbatic law. And I sinned knowing that I was sinning. So, grave is my sin... And great will be the sacrifice that I will consume to be forgiven. And momentous is the reason that instigated my commission of this sin... Jehovah, Who is just, will be indulgent to His guilty servant in view of the important motive that drove me to sin...»

«Once you did not speak like that. The Most High was only rigid severity as far as you were concerned. And you were perfect because you feared Him as an inexorable God...»

«Oh! perfect!... Joseph, I have never confessed my secret faults to you... But it is true. I did judge God inexorable. Like many in Israel. We were taught to consider Him thus: the God of vengeance...»

«And you have continued to believe so even after the Rabbi came to let His people know the true Face of God, His true Heart... The Face, the Heart of a Father...»

«It's true. But... I had never heard Him speak for any length of time... But... you will remember, since the first time I saw Him at the banquet in your house, I assumed an attitude of... respect, if not of love for the Rabbi.»

«That is true... But for the love I have for you I would like you to pass on to an attitude of love for Him. Respect is too little...»

«You love Him, don't you, Joseph?»

«Yes, I do. And I am telling you, although I know that the Chief Priests hate

those who love the Rabbi. But you are not capable of delation...»

«No. I am not... And I would like to be like you. But shall I ever succeed?»

«I will pray that you may succeed. It would be your eternal salvation, my dear friend...»

Silence follows full of reflections...

Then Joseph asks: «You told me that a grave motive drove you to infringe the Sabbath. Which? Can I ask you without being too indiscreet? I think that you have come to have help from your friend... And I must know, in order to help you...»

John rubs his forehead with his hand, he presses his broad forehead, which is beginning to go bald, as is typical of men in full virility, he mechanically caresses his grizzly hair, his thick squarecut beard... He then raises his head, stares at Joseph saying: «Yes. An important reason. And a painful one. And... a great hope...»

«Which?»

«Joseph, can you believe that my house is like hell and will soon no longer be a home... as it will soon be devastated, dispersed, destroyed, crushed?»

«What? What are you saying? Are you raving?»

«No, I am not... My wife wants to leave me... Are you surprised?»

«... Yes... I am... because I have always known her to be good... and because your family seemed to be a model one... you all kindness... she all virtue...»

John sits down holding his head in his hands...

Joseph goes on: «Now... this... decision... I... Well... I cannot believe that Anne has done anything wrong... or that you have... But I believe even less with regard to her... entirely devoted to her home and children... No!... There can be no fault in her!...»

«Are you sure? Really sure?»

«Oh! my poor friend! I have not the eye of God. But as far as I can judge, that is what I think...»

«Do you not think that Anne is... unfaithful ...?»

«Anne?! But, my friend! Has the summer sun injured your brain? Unfaithful with whom? She never leaves the house, she prefers the country to town. She works as the best of her servants, she is nothing but humble, modest, active, loving with you and the children. A light woman does not love such things. Believe me. Oh! John, on what do you ground your suspicion? Since when?»

«I have always suspected.»

«Always? Well, yours is a disease!...»

«Yes. And... Joseph, I have many faults. But I do not want to confess them to you only. The day before yesterday some disciples and poor people passed by my house. They said that the Rabbi was on His way to your house. And yesterday... yesterday was a very stormy day for my house... so much so that Anne took the decision I told you... During the night – and what a night – I have pondered very much... And I came to the conclusion that only He, the perfect Rabbi...»

«Divine, John, divine!»

«... As you wish... That He only can cure me and repair... rebuild my house, giving Anne... my children... everything back to me...» The man is weeping and while shedding tears he continues:

«Because He only sees and speaks the truth... and I will believe Him... Joseph, my friend, let me stay here and wait for Him...»

«The Master is here. He will leave after sunset. I will go and call Him for you» and Joseph goes out...

After a few minutes the curtain is drawn again to let Jesus pass... John stands up and bows respectfully.

«Peace to you, John. Why have you been looking for Me?»

«That You may help me to see... and You may save me. I am very unhappy. I have sinned against God and against my wife. And from one sin to another I have come to the point of infringing the Sabbatic law. Absolve me, Master.»

«The Sabbatic law! A great holy law! And far be it from Me the idea of considering it of no importance and old-fashioned. But why do you put it before the first commandment? What? You ask Me to absolve you for infringing the Sabbath and you do not ask absolution for lacking charity and torturing an

innocent soul, driving to despair and to the threshold of sin the soul of your wife? You ought to be distressed about that more than anything else! About calumniating her...»

«Lord, I have only spoken to Joseph about it, a short time ago. I have not mentioned it to anybody else, believe me. I kept my grief so secret that my good friend Joseph was not aware of anything, and he was amazed when I told him. He has now told You, in order to help me. Joseph is a just man and he will not talk to anybody about it.»

«He has not mentioned it to Me. He only told Me that you wanted Me.»

«Oh! How do You know then?»

«How do I know? As God knows the secrets of hearts. Shall I tell you the state of your heart?»...

Joseph is about to withdraw discreetly. But John himself stops him saying: «Oh! Stay. You are my friend! Since you were groomsman at my wedding, you can help me with the Rabbi!...» and Joseph remains.

«Shall I tell you? Do you want Me to help you to know yourself? Oh! be not afraid! I do not have a cruel hand. I can uncover wounds but I do not make them bleed to cure them. I can understand and be indulgent. And I know how to cure and heal, provided one wants to be cured. And you do want it. So much so that you have looked for Me. Sit here, beside Me, between Joseph and Me. He was your groomsman at your earthly wedding. I would like to be the best man of your spiritual wedding... «Oh! I would love that!... Now, listen to Me carefully. And answer all My questions frankly. What do you think of the action of God Who created man and woman, so that they should be united? Was it a good or a bad thing?»

«A good one, Lord. Like all the things made by God.»

«You are right. Now tell Me: if the action was good, what were to be its consequences?»

«Equally good, Lord. And they were good, although Satan came to upset them, because Adam was always comforted by Eve, and Eve by Adam. And their consolation was more deeply felt when alone, exiles on the Earth, they supported each other. Also material consequences were good, that is, their children, through whom mankind propagated, and the power and goodness of

God shone.»

«Why? Which power and goodness?»

«Well... the one carried out in favour of men. If we look back... yes... there are just punishments, but there are many, more numerous good deeds... And the Covenant made with Abraham and renewed with Jacob is infinite goodness... and up to the present day. And repeated by truthful lips: the prophets... up to John...»

«And by the Rabbi, John» interrupts Joseph.

«Those are not the lips of a prophet... or the lips of a Master... They are... much more.»

Jesus smiles lightly at the... still restricted profession of faith of the member of the Sanhedrin, who does not go to the extent of saying: «They are divine lips» although he already thinks so.

«So God did the right thing in joining man and woman together. Agreed. But how did He want man and woman to be?» asks Jesus.

«One body only.»

«All right. Now, can the body hate itself?»

«No.»

«Can one member hate another member?»

«No.»

«Can one member separate from another?»

«No. Gangrene only, or leprosy or an accident can amputate a member from the rest of the body.»

«Very well. Therefore only a sorrowful or wicked thing can separate what by God's will is one unit only?»

«It is so, Master.»

«Well, then, although you are convinced of such things, why do you not love your body, and you hate it so much, that you get gangrene to grow between one member and another, whereby the weaker member, the mortified one, separates and leaves you all alone?»

John lowers his head, becomes silent while fretting the fringes of his garment.

«I will tell you why. Because Satan, the usual disturber, has come between you and your wife. Nay: he has come into you, with a disorderly love for your wife. *And when love is disorderly, it becomes hatred*, John. Satan has worked on your virile sensuality to get you to commit sin. Because that is where your sin began. *From one disorder that has brought about new and much graver disorders*. In your wife you have not seen only a good companion and the mother of your children, but also an object of pleasure, And that has made your eyes like those of an ox, which sees everything altered. You saw things as you were seeing them. *That is how you saw your wife. An object of pleasure for you*. You considered her such also for other people, whence your feverish jealousy, your irrational fear, your sinful arrogance, which made of her a frightened, imprisoned, tortured, slandered woman. What does it matter if you do not beat her, if you do not revile her in public? *Your suspicion is a stick, your doubt is slander!* You calumniate her thinking that she could go to the extent of being unfaithful to you. What does it matter if you treat her as your rank demands? *In the privacy of your home she is worse than a slave for you, because of your beastlike lust, which degrades her beyond endurance*, and which she has suffered silently and submissively, hoping to convince you, to calm you, to make you good, and which has only served to irritate you more and more, to the extent of turning your house into a hell, in which the demons of lust and jealousy are roaring. *Jealousy!* What can you think of more slanderous for a wife than jealousy? And what is a clearer indication of the state of a heart than jealousy? You may rest assured that *wherever it nestles, foolish, irrational, groundless, offensive, obstinate as it is, there can be no love for one's neighbour or for God. But there is selfishness*. You ought to be grieved over all that, not at infringing the close of the Sabbath! And to be forgiven you must repair the ruin caused by you...»

«But Anne wants to go away, by now... Come and convince her... You are the only one who can judge whether she is really innocent, after hearing her speak, and...»

«John!! You want to be cured and yet you do not want to believe what I say?»

«You are right, my Lord. Change my heart. It is true. I have no well-grounded reason to suspect. But I love her so much... lewdly, it is true... You have seen the real situation... Everything is shadowy to me...»

«Come into the Light. Come out of the burning confusion of sensuality, which is so fierce. It will cost you at first... But it would cost you much more to lose a good wife and deserve hell, expiating your sins of lack of love, slander and adultery, and hers as well, because I remind you that who drives a woman to divorce, places himself and her on the way to adultery. If you can resist your demon for one month, at least for one month, I promise you that your nightmare will come to an end. Will you promise Me?»

«Oh! Lord! Lord! I would like to... But it is a fire... Put it out, You are powerful!...» John has fallen on to his knees before Jesus and is weeping with his head in his hands as he kneels on the floor.

«And I will appease it. I will limit it. I will check and restrain this demon. But you have sinned much, John, and you must work by yourself at your revival. Those who have been converted by Me, came to Me willing to become new, free... They had already worked, with their own strength only, the beginning of their redemption. Such as Matthew, Mary of Lazarus and many more. You have come here *only to find out whether she is guilty and to be helped by Me not to lose the fountain at which your pleasure drinks*. I will limit the power of your demon for three months, not for one. During that time meditate and rise. Resolve to start a new life as a husband. The life of a man gifted with soul. Not the life of a brute as you have led so far. And fortified by prayer and by meditation, by the peace which I will give you as a gift for three months, learn to struggle and conquer eternal Life and win back the love and peace of your wife and of your home. Go.»

«But what shall I tell Anne? I may find her ready to leave... Which words shall I speak after so many years of... insults, to persuade her that I love her and that I do not want to lose her? Please come with me...»

«I cannot. *But it is so simple... Be humble*. Call her to one side and confess your torment. Tell her that you came to Me because you want to be forgiven by God. And tell her to forgive you because *God's forgiveness will be given to you only if she invokes it for you and she is the first to give you it...* Oh! unhappy man! How much good, how much peace you have dissipated through your lust! How much evil is brought about by the unruliness of senses and by the disorder of affections! Rise and go away with a peaceful mind. Do you not understand that *your wife, who is good and faithful to you, is more distressed than you are at the thought of having to leave you and is waiting only for one word from you* so that she may say to you: “You have been forgiven everything”? You may go now, as

the sun is already set. So you are not committing any sin in going back to your house... And the Saviour absolves you of the sin you committed in coming to Him. Go in peace. And sin no more.»

«Oh! Master! Master!... I do not deserve such words!... Master... I... want to love You from now on...»

«Yes, of course. Go and do not delay. And remember this hour when I will be the slandered Innocent.»

«What do You mean?»

«Nothing. Go. Goodbye» and Jesus withdraws leaving the two members of the Sanhedrin moved and excited in judging Him really holy and wise as only God can be.

408. The Apostles Speak.

5th April 1946.

«I am dying to be up in the mountains!» exclaims Peter puffing and blowing and wiping the perspiration that trickles down his cheeks and neck.

«What? You hated mountains, and now you want them?» sarcastically asks Judas Iscariot, who has become overbearing and bold once again, now that he sees that his fear of being found out has come to nothing,

«Yes, now I really want them. At this time of the year they are the right place. Not just like my sea... That one, ah! But... I do not understand why fields are warmer after harvest time. The sun is still the same, and yet...»

«It is not a question that they are warmer. The fact is that they are gloomier and one feels more depressed looking at them thus, than when they are full of corn» sensibly replies Matthew.

«No. Simon is right. They are unbearably warm after they have been reaped. I never felt so worn» says James of Zebedee.

«Never? And what about the heat we suffered going to Nike?» retorts Judas of Kerioth.

«It was never as bad as this» replies Andrew.

«No wonder! Summer is now forty days ahead and consequently the sun is scorching hot» insists Judas.

«It is a fact that stubble gives off more heat than fields full of corn, and the reason is clear. The sunbeams, which previously stopped on the top of the ears, now blaze down directly on the bare burnt ground and the latter reflects its heat upwards, in opposition to the sun that descends from above, and thus man finds himself between two fires» sententiously says Bartholomew.

The Iscariot laughs ironically and he gives a low bow to his companion saying: «Rabbi Nathanael, I greet you and thank you for your learned lesson.» He is as offensive as one can be.

Bartholomew looks at him... but is silent. Philip, instead defends him: «There is no need to be ironical! What he said is correct! You are surely not going to deny a truth that millions of people with good common sense have judged to be true, logical and verifiable.»

«Of course! Of course! I know, that you are all learned, experts, sensible, good, perfect people... You are everything! Everything! I only am the black sheep in the white herd!... I only am the bastard lamb, the disgrace that is disclosed and puts on ram-horns... I only am the sinner, the imperfect one, the cause of all the evil among us, in Israel, in the world... perhaps also in the stars... I cannot stand this any longer! Not so much because I see that I am the last, but because I see that nonentities, like those two fools who are speaking to the Master, are admired as if they were two holy oracles, I am tired of...»

«Listen, boy...» Peter begins to say, while red in the face not so much from the heat, as from his efforts in controlling himself.

But Judas Thaddeus interrupts him: «Are you judging other people by your own standard? Try and be a “nonentity” yourself like my brother James and John of Zebedee, and there will no longer be imperfections in the apostolic group.»

«See now, whether I am right! I am imperfection! Ah! that's too much! But it is...»

«Yes, I think that it was too much the wine that Joseph made us drink and in this heat it is upsetting you... just a reaction of the blood...» says very calmly Thomas, to make a joke of the quarrel, which is about to arise.

But Peter has worn out his patience and with set teeth and clenched fists to continue to master himself, he says: «Listen boy. There is one thing only advisable for you: part for a little while...»

«I? Part? By your order? The Master only can give me orders and I will obey Him only. Who are you? A poor...»

«An ignorant, coarse, good-for-nothing fisherman. You are right... I am the first to say that. And before the omnipresent, all-seeing Jehovah, I testify that I would prefer to be the last, instead of the first, I declare that I would like to see you or anybody else in my place, but you above all, so that you might be freed from the monster of jealousy, which makes you unfair, and I wish I had but to obey you, my boy... And believe me, it would cost me much less trouble than having to speak to you as the “first”. But He, the Master, appointed me the “first” among you... And I must obey Him first of all and more than I have to obey anybody else. And you must obey. And with my good sense of a fisherman I tell you to part, not as you have understood, mistaking my soothing words for fiery ones, but to go away for a short while and be alone, to meditate... You were behind us all from Bether to the valley. Do that again... The Master ahead... you in the rear... we... the nonentities, in the middle... All one has to do to understand and to calm down is to be alone... Listen to me... It is better for everybody, and for you first of all...» And he takes him by the arm and pulls him out of the group, saying: «There, stay there while we join the Master. Then... come slowly, slowly... and you will see that the storm will soon be over» and he leaves him, joining his companions who are already a few metres ahead.

«Ugh! I perspired more speaking to him than walking... What temperament! Shall we ever be able to get something from him?»

«Never, Simon. My brother persists in keeping him. But... He will never get any good out of him» replies Judas Thaddeus to him.

«He is a real punishment for us!» whispers Andrew, and he concludes: «John and I are almost afraid of him and we always keep quiet fearing further quarrels.»

«It is in fact the best policy» says Bartholomew.

«I just cannot keep quiet» admits Thaddeus.

«I am not very successful either... But I have found the secret to become so» says Peter.

«Which? Tell us...» they all say.

«Working like an ox at the plough. Even a useless job... Something that serves to get off my chest the load that is brewing up inside me... something that is not Judas.»

«Ah! I understand! That is why you made such havoc of plants when descending to the valley! That's why, eh?» asks James of Zebedee.

«That's it... But today... here... I had nothing to break without causing damage. There are only fruit trees and it would be a sin to spoil them... I worked three times as hard... breaking myself... so that I would not be the old Simon of Capernaum... And my bones are aching...»

Bartholomew and the Zealot make the same gesture and utter the same words: they embrace Peter exclaiming: «And you are astonished that He appointed you the first among us? You are a teacher to us...»

«Me? Because of that?... A trifle!... I am a poor man... I ask you only to love me by giving me wise advice, simple loving advice. Love and simplicity that I may become like you... And only for His sake as He is already so grieved...»

«You are right. That we at least may not be the cause of His grief!» exclaims Matthew.

«I had a terrible fright when Johanna sent for Him. You two, who have gone ahead, do you really not know anything?» asks Thomas.

«No, nothing for certain. But we have been thinking that it was in connection with that fellow behind there... who has been up to something» replies Peter.

«Be quiet! I suspected the same when I heard the Master speak on the Sabbath» admits Judas Thaddeus.

«So did I» answers James of Zebedee.

«Oh!... I never thought of that... not even when I saw Judas so gloomy, so rude that evening, I must say» says Thomas.

«Well. Let us forget about it. And let us try to... improve him, with our love and sacrifices. As Marjiam taught us...» says Peter.

«What will Marjiam be doing?» asks Andrew smiling.

«Who knows!?... We shall soon be with him. I am dying to see him... These

separations really cost me so much.»

«I wonder why the Master wants this. Now... Marjiam also could be with us. He is no longer a little frail boy» remarks James of Zebedee.

«And then... If he walked such a long way last year when he was so weak, he could walk all the more now» says Philip.

«I think that it is to avoid him seeing certain disgraceful things...» says Matthew.

«Or being in touch with certain people...» grumbles Thaddeus who just cannot put up with the Iscariot.

«Perhaps you are both right» says Peter.

«Surely not! He must be doing it to let the boy grow stronger. You will see that next year the boy is with us» states Thomas.

«Next year! Will the Master still be with us next year?» asks Bartholomew pensively. «His speeches seem... so allusive to me...»

«Don't say that!» implore the others.

«I don't like to say so. But not saying does not serve to remove what is destined to happen.»

«Well... That is another reason why we should improve much during the next months... In order not to grieve Him by not being ready. I mean, now that we shall be resting in Galilee, He should teach us twelve particularly as much as possible... In any case we shall soon be there...»

«Yes. And I am longing for that. I am old and these marches in this heat cause much personal trouble to me» confesses Bartholomew.

«And to me. I was a vicious man and if you count my years I am older than you think. Excesses... eh! I feel all their consequences in my bones now... And we children of Levi suffer from such trouble by nature...»

«And what about me? I was ill for years... and that life in caves, with scanty miserable food. One feels the effect of such situations!...» says the Zealot.

«But you have always said that since you were cured you have been feeling strong?» asks Judas who has joined them and is behind the Zealot. «Has perhaps the effect of the miracle come to an end?»

The disfigured but expressive face of the Zealot makes a typical grimace, and seems to say: «He is here! Lord, grant me patience!» But he replies most kindly: «No. The effect of the miracle is not over. And you can see that. I have not been taken ill again. I am strong and healthy. But years are years and fatigue is fatigue. And this heat, which causes us to get as wet with perspiration as if we had fallen into a ditch, and the nights, which I would say are ice-cold as compared with the heat of the day and freeze perspiration on our bodies, while the dew adds more humidity to our garments already wet with sweat, all that certainly does me no good. And I am longing to have a rest so that I can take care of myself. In the morning, particularly when we sleep under the open sky, I am stiff all over. If I become an invalid, of what use shall I be?»

«You will be able to suffer. Jesus says that suffering is as good as work and prayer» Andrew replies to him.

«That's all right. But I prefer to serve Him apostolically and...»

«And you are tired, too. Admit it. You are tired of continuing this life without any prospect of pleasant hours, on the contrary, with the prospect of persecutions and... defeat. You are beginning to consider that you are running the risk of becoming an outlaw once again» says Judas of Kerioth.

«I am not considering anything. I am saying that I feel that I am going to fall ill.»

«Oh! as He cured you once!...» and Judas laughs ironically.

Bartholomew feels that another squabble is approaching and to divert it he calls Jesus. «Master! Is there nothing for us? You are always ahead of us!...»

«You are right, Bartholmai. But we are going to stop now. See that little house? We will go there because the sun is too strong. We will set out again in the evening. We must make haste in going back to Jerusalem, because Pentecost is close at hand.»

«What were you speaking of?» Judas Thaddeus asks his brother.

«Just imagine! We began to speak about Joseph of Arimathea and we ended up by talking about the old property of Joachim at Nazareth and about his habit – as long as he was able to do so – of taking half of the crops for himself giving the rest to the poor, which the old people in Nazareth remember so well. How abstinent were those two just people, Anne and Joachim! No wonder they were

granted the miracle of a Daughter, of that Daughter!... And with Jesus I was recalling the past, when we were children...» And they continue talking while going towards the house through sunny fields.

 Jesus says: «You will put here the vision of the miraculous gleaning on behalf of the little old woman (in the plain between Emmaus on the plain and the mountains towards Jerusalem) which you had on September 27th 1944.»

409. The Miraculous Gleaning in the Plain.

27th September 1944.

Jesus is passing with His apostles through a country completely golden with crops. Although early morning it is very warm. The reapers are mowing along furrows thick with ears, making empty spaces among the golden grain. The sickles shine for a moment in the sun, they disappear among the tall ears, they reappear for a moment on the other side and the sheaf bends and lies down on the earth warmed by the sun, as if it were tired of standing up for so many months. Some women follow the reapers, tying the sheaves. The whole country is busy at this work. The harvest has been very good and the reapers are overjoyed.

Many men, when they are near the road along which the apostolic group passes, stop working for a moment leaning on their scythes and wiping their perspiration and they look... The women binding the sheaves do the same. In their light clothes, their heads covered with a white cloth, they look like flowers emerging from the earth deprived of the corn: poppies, cornflowers, daisies. The men, in short grey or yellowish tunics, are not so showy. The only light article they wear is a piece of cloth tied to their heads with a cord and hanging over their necks and cheeks. Their tanned faces, framed by the white cloth, seem ever darker.

When Jesus sees that they are looking at Him, He passes greeting: «The peace and blessing of God be with you» and the others reply: «May the blessing of God come back to You» or more simply: «Also with You.»

Some who are more talkative, interest Jesus in the harvest saying: «It is very good this year. Look at these well-shaped ears and see how thick they are in the furrows. It is hard work to cut them. But it's bread!...»

«Be grateful to the Lord. And you know that one must show one's gratitude not by words, but by deeds. Be merciful in your harvest, thinking of the Most High Who mercifully granted dew and sunshine to your fields, so that you might have a plentiful crop. Remember the precept of Deuteronomy. When harvesting the wealth given to you by God, think of those who have none, and leave them some of yours. It is a holy prevarication as it is charity for your neighbour and God sees it. It is better to be willing to give than greedy in gathering. God blesses generous people. There is more happiness in giving than in receiving, because it compels God, Who is just, to give a more abundant reward to him who was compassionate.» Jesus passes repeating His advice of love.

The sun becomes warmer. The reapers stop working and those who are near their houses go back to them, those who are far from them gather in the shade of trees and they rest, eat and doze there.

Jesus also takes shelter in a thicket in the middle of the country and sitting on the grass, after praying and offering their frugal food, consisting of bread, cheese and olives, He hands out the portions and eats talking to His apostles. There is shade, coolness and perfect silence. The silence of sunny hours in summer. A silence inviting one to sleep. Most of them, in fact, are dozing after eating. Jesus is not dozing. He is resting leaning with His back against a tree, and He takes an interest in insects working on flowers.

At a certain moment he beckons to John, Judas Iscariot and to one of the older apostles, whom He calls Bartholomew, and when they are close to Him, He says: «Just watch the work this little insect is doing. Look. I have been watching it for some time. It wants to take from this chalice, which is so tiny, the honey that fills the bottom part of it, and as it cannot get into it, look: it stretches out first one little leg and then the other one, it dips them into the honey and then feeds on it. It has almost emptied it. See what a wonderful thing is God's Providence! Not ignoring that without certain organs the olive-green insect, created to fly over green meadows, would not be able to nourish itself, Providence gifted it with tiny hairs along its legs. Can you see them? Can you, Bartholomew? No? Look. I will now catch it and show it to you against the light», and He delicately takes the scarab, which looks like burnished gold, and lays it upside-down on the back of His hand.

The scarab pretends to be dead and the three examine its tiny legs. Then the insect begins to kick its legs about, in order to run away. It does not succeed, of course, but Jesus helps it and stands it on its legs. The little creature walks on the palm of Jesus' hand, as far as His finger-tips, it dangles and opens its wings. But it is distrustful. «It does not know that I want nothing but the welfare of every being. It has only its little instinct, which is perfect if compared with its nature, and sufficient to all its needs. But it is so inferior to human thought. An insect, therefore, is not responsible if it does anything wrong. Man is, because he has within himself a superior light of intelligence, which will be greater the more he is indoctrinated in the things of God. And consequently he is responsible for his actions.»

«So, Master, since we are taught by You, have we a heavy responsibility?» asks Bartholomew.

«Yes, very heavy. And it will be even heavier in future when the Sacrifice is accomplished, and Redemption has come together with Grace, which is strength and light. And after it, One will come Who will make you understand will-power even better. And he who does not want that, will be held responsible.»

«Very few only, then, will be saved!»

«Why Bartholomew?»

«Because man is so weak!»

«But if he fortifies his weakness by trusting Me, he becomes strong. Do you think that I am not aware of your struggles? See? Satan is like that spider that is laying its snare from that tiny branch to this stem. It is so thin and treacherous! Look how that cobweb shines. It looks like the silver of impalpable filigree. It will be invisible at night and at dawn, tomorrow, it will shine with gems, and imprudent flies, which roam at night looking for unclean food, will fall into it, as well as light butterflies, which are attracted by what shines...»

The apostles have approached the Master and are listening to the lesson taken from the vegetable and animal kingdoms.

«... Well, My love does, with regard to Satan, what My hand is doing now. It destroys the cobweb. Look how the spider runs away and hides. It is afraid of what is stronger. Satan also is afraid of what is stronger. And what is stronger is Love.»

«Would it not be better to destroy the spider?» asks Peter, who is very practical in his conclusions.

«It would be better. But the spider is doing its duty. It is true that it kills the poor little butterflies, which are so beautiful, but it exterminates a large number of filthy flies, which carry diseases and infection from sick to healthy people, from corpses to living persons.»

«But in our case what does the spider do?»

«What does it do, Simon? (Simon also is an elderly man and is the one who was complaining of rheumatism). It does what your good will does. *It destroys tepidity, apathy, vain conceit.* It compels you to be vigilant. What makes you worthy of prize? *Struggle and victory.* Can you win if you do not fight? *The presence of Satan compels continuous vigilance.* Love, then, Who loves you, makes his presence not necessarily harmful. *If you keep close to Love, Satan will tempt but he will be rendered unable to cause real damage.»*

«Always?»

«Always. In great and little things. For instance, a little thing: he in vain advises you to take care of your health. A treacherous piece of advice to try to take you away from Me. But Love holds you tightly, Simon, and your pains become of no importance even in your eyes.»

«Oh! Lord! You know?...»

«Yes, I do. But do not lose heart. Cheer up! Love, Who is the first to smile at your human nature trembling because of its rheumatism, will give you so much courage...» Jesus laughs at His embarrassed apostle and clasps him in His arms to comfort him. Even when laughing He is full of dignity. The others also laugh.

«Who is coming to help that poor old woman?» says Jesus pointing at a little old woman who, defying the great heat, is gleaning in the fields already reaped.

«I» reply John, Thomas and James.

But Peter takes John by the sleeve and pulling him a little aside, says to him: «Ask the Master what is making Him so happy. I asked Him but all He said to me was: “My happiness is in seeing that a soul is looking for the Light.” But if you ask Him... He tells you everything.»

John is in a state of uncertainty, drawn one way by reservedness and another by

desire to know and to please Peter. He slowly joins Jesus Who is already gleaning in the field. The old woman, seeing so many young people, makes a desolate gesture and busies herself endeavouring to work faster.

«Woman! Woman!» cries Jesus. «I will glean for you. Do not stand in the sun, mother. I am coming.»

The little old woman, dumbfounded at so much kindness, stares at Him, she then obeys and stooping and trembling a little all over her lean body she moves towards the thin strip of shade along the edge of the field. Jesus moves about quickly gathering ears. John follows Him close at hand. Thomas and James are a little farther away.

«Master» says John panting. «How come You find so many ears? In the adjoining furrow I find so few!»

Jesus smiles but does not speak. I could not swear to it, but I think that ears, which have been cut but not picked up, spring up wherever Jesus' divine eyes rest. He gathers them and smiles. He has a big bunch of ears in His arms.

«Take Mine, John. So you will have many as well and the little mother will be happy.»

«But, Master... You are working a miracle? It is not possible for You to find so many!»

«Hush! It's for the little mother... thinking of your mother and Mine. Look, what a little old soul she is!... Good God, Who feeds new-born little birds, wants to fill the tiny granary of this grandmother. She will have bread for the months she has still left. She will not see the next harvest. But I do not want her to starve during her last winter. You will now hear her exclamations, John, be ready to have your ears rent, as I will be ready to be washed by her tears and kisses...»

«How cheerful You have been for some days, Jesus! Why?»

«Do you want to know or has someone sent you?»

John, already flushed with fatigue, becomes crimson.

Jesus understands: «Tell him who sent you that there is a brother of Mine who is ill and wants to be cured. His good will to recover fills Me with joy.»

«Who is it, Master?»

«A brother of yours, one whom Jesus loves, a sinner.»

«So, not one of us?»

«John, do you think that there is no sin among you? Do you think that I rejoice only because of you?»

«No, Master. I know that we are sinners, too, and that You want to save all men.»

«So? I said to you: “Do not be inquisitive” when there was evil to be discovered. I say the same now that good is dawning... Peace to you, mother! Here are the ears we have picked. My companions will come with theirs.»

«May God bless You, son. How did You find so many? It's true that I cannot see very well. But these are really two big sheaves... very big...» The old woman feels them, her trembling hand caresses them, she wants to lift them... But she cannot.

«We will help you. Where is your house?»

«That one» and she points at a little house beyond the fields.

«You are alone, are you not?»

«Yes, how do You know? And who are You?»

«I am one who has a mother.»

«Is this your brother?»

«He is My friend.»

From behind Jesus' back, His friend makes wide gestures to the old woman. But with her veiled eyes she cannot see them. In any case, she is too intent on watching Jesus. Her old mother's heart is deeply moved.

«You are in a sweat, son. Come here in the shade of this tree. Sit down. Look how You are streaming with perspiration! Dry Yourself with my veil. It's worn but clean. Here, take it, son.»

«Thank you, mother.»

«Blessed be Your mother, the mother of so good a son. Tell me Your name and Hers. That I may mention them to God to bless You.»

«Mary and Jesus.»

«Mary and Jesus... Mary and Jesus... Wait. Once I shed bitter tears... The son of my son was killed for defending his baby boy and my son died of grief... and at that time they said that the innocent was killed because they were looking for one whose name was Jesus... Now I am on the threshold of death and that Name is coming back to me...»

«You wept then, mother, because of that Name. May that Name now bless you...»

«You are that Jesus... say so to a poor woman who is about to die and who has lived without cursing because she was told that her grief served to save the Messiah for Israel.»

John doubles his gestures. Jesus is silent.

«Oh! tell me! Is it You? You... blessing me at the end of my life? In the name of God, speak.»

«It is I.»

«Ah!» the old woman prostrates herself on the ground. «My Saviour! I have lived in expectation and I no longer hoped to see You. Shall I see Your triumph?»

«No, mother. Like Moses, you will die without knowing that day. But I will give you the peace of God in advance. I am Peace. I am the Way. I am Life. You, a mother and the grandmother of just children, will see Me in another eternal triumph and I will open the gates to you, to your son, to the son of your son and to his baby boy. That baby who died for Me is sacred to the Lord! Do not weep, mother!...»

«And I have touched You! And You gathered ears for me! Oh! How did I deserve such honour?!»

«Through your holy resignation. Come, mother, to your house. And may this wheat nourish your soul more than your body. I am the true Bread that descended from Heaven to satisfy the hunger of every heart. You (Thomas and James have joined them with their sheaf)... take these sheaves and let us go.»

And the three apostles laden with the sheaves walk away, followed by Jesus and the grandmother who weeps and whispers prayers. They arrive at the little

house: two small rooms, a tiny kitchen, a fig-tree and a small vineyard. Tidiness and poverty.

«Is this your home?»

«Yes, it is. Bless it, Lord!»

«Call me: son. And pray that My Mother may find solace in Her grief, since you know what the grief of a mother means. Goodbye, mother. I bless you in the name of the true God.»

And Jesus raises His hand and blesses the small house. He then bends and embraces the little old woman, He presses her to His heart and kisses her head covered with thin white hair. And she weeps rubbing her lips against Jesus' hands with veneration and love... and crushes me with grief. Because I think of my mother who was afraid of You, Jesus, when she saw You... Why be afraid of You, Jesus?

Jesus says:

«Why? There are many whys in your heart after this dictation. But I will begin from the last one. [...]

The other query you have in your heart is always whether I knew that Judas would not be saved notwithstanding that effort to save him. I knew. Why then was I happy? Because also the simple desire that was present, a flower in the barren land of Judas' heart, made the Father look benignly at My disciple whom I loved and whom I could not save. The eye of God on a heart! What would I like except that the Father should look at all of you with love? And I had to be happy to give the poor wretch also that means to revive. The incentive of My joy seeing him come back to Me.

One day, after My Death, John became acquainted with this truth and he told Peter, James, Andrew and the others, because I had ordered My best-loved Apostle, who was acquainted with the all the secrets of My heart, to do so. He was informed and he told them, so that everyone should have a rule in guiding disciples and believers later.

The soul that after falling comes to the minister of God and confesses its error, the friend, the son, the husband or the brother, who after erring, comes saying: «Keep me with you. I do not want to make mistakes any more so that I may not

grieve God and you”, are not to be deprived, among other things, of the satisfaction of seeing our happiness in realising that they are anxious to make us happy. Infinite tact is required in curing hearts. I, the Wisdom, had such tact to teach everybody the art of redeeming and of helping those who are redeeming themselves, although I knew that in the case of Judas it was useless.

And now I say to you what I said to Simon of Cana: “Cheer up”, and I clasp you in My arms to make you feel that there is someone who loves you. My hands give punishments, but they give caresses as well, and My lips speak severe words and also words of satisfaction and the latter are more numerous and uttered with so much more joy.

Go in peace, Mary. You have not grieved your Jesus, and may that be your comfort.»

410. The Lily of the Valley.

8th April 1946.

The apostolic group has left the plain behind and along hilly roads, among mountains and valleys, it is going towards Jerusalem. To shorten the journey they have not taken the main roads, but solitary tiring short cuts, which are, however, very quick.

At present they are in the bottom of a green valley rich in waters and little flowers. There are also many sweet-smelling lilies of the valley, which causes Thaddeus to remark that it is only right to call such flowers «lilies of the valley» and praise their fragile yet resistant beauty and their delicate fragrance.

«But they are upside-down lilies» remarks Thomas. «They look down instead of looking up.»

«And how tiny they are! We have flowers which are more pompous than those. I do not understand why they praise them so much...» says Judas scornfully, striking a little tuft of lilies of the valley in flower.

«No! Why? They are so gentle looking!» intervenes Andrew defending the poor flowers and he bends to pick up the broken stems.

«They look like hay, nothing else. The agave is more beautiful, it is so majestic and imposing. Worthy of God and of flowering for God.»

«I see God more in these minute chalices... Look how graceful they are!... Indented, so concave... They look like alabaster, pure wax and they seem to have been made by very tiny hands... Instead it was the Immense One Who made them! Oh! Power of God!...» Andrew is almost ecstatic in contemplation meditating on flowers and the perfection of the Creator.

«You look like a poor little woman suffering from nervous trouble!...» teases Judas of Kerioth laughing maliciously.

«No. In actual fact I also – and I am a goldsmith and thus an expert in the matter – I also find that these stems are perfect. It is more difficult to reproduce them in metal than it is to reproduce an agave. Because you ought to know, my friend, that it is the infinitely small that reveals the ability of a craftsman. Give me a stem, Andrew... And you, whose goggle eyes admire only grand things, come here and look. Which craftsman could make cups so light and perfect as these, decorating them with those tiny topazes down there, in the bottom, and joining them to the stem by means of this graceful curved filigree... It's wonderful!...»

«Oh! what poets have risen among us! You, too, Thomas, so...»

«I am neither a fool nor a poor little woman, you know! I'm an artist. A sensitive artist. And I am proud of it. Master, do You like these flowers?» Thomas asks Jesus Who has been listening without saying anything.

«I like the whole of Creation. But these flowers are among the ones of which I am particularly fond...»

«Why?» ask several apostles. And at the same time Judas asks: «Do you like vipers as well?» and he laughs.

«Yes, they also serve...»

«What purpose?» ask many.

«To bite. Ah! Ah! Ah!» says Judas laughing offensively.

«In that case you should like them very much» retorts Thaddeus interrupting Judas' laughter with a very clear allusion. The others are now laughing at the witty remark.

Jesus does not laugh. On the contrary, He is pale and sad. He looks at His twelve

apostles and particularly at the two antagonists who are watching each other, one angrily, the other severely, and He replies to them all, in order to reply to the Iscariot in particular.

«If God created them, it means that they serve. Nothing in creation is useless or entirely harmful. Evil only is clearly and solely noxious and woe to those who allow it to bite them. One of the effects of its bite is the inability to tell Good from Evil, then there is the deviation of reason and of conscience led astray towards evil things, and then spiritual blindness, because of which, Judas of Simon, one does not see the power of God shine on things, even when they are tiny. And His power is written on this flower, through its beauty and scent, and its shape, which is so different from any other flower, and through this drop of dew which trembles and glitters suspended on the waxen edge of the tiny petal and seems a tear of gratitude to the Creator, Who made everything well, useful and varied. But it is written that everything was beautiful for the first parents, until their eyes became opaque with sin... And everything spoke to them of God until the fluid, which distorted their capacity for seeing God, was instilled into things, or rather, into their eyes. Even nowadays, the more the spirit is the sovereign in a human creature, the more God reveals Himself...»

«Solomon sang the wonders of God and so did David... and yet their spirits were not their sovereigns! Master, I caught You out this time.»

«How impudent you are! How dare you say that?»

«Let him speak... I do not take into consideration his words, which the wind dispels and which do not scandalise herbs and trees. We are the only ones to hear them and we know how to attach to them the importance they deserve, do we not? And we do not remember them any longer. Youth is often thoughtless, Bartholmai. You must pity it... But someone was asking Me why I prefer the lily of the valley... This is My reply: "Because of its humility". Everything in it speaks of humility... The spots it loves... the attitude of the flower... It makes Me think of My Mother... This flower... so tiny! And yet how sweet is the perfume of one flower alone. The air around it is scented by it... My Mother also... humble, reserved, unknown, She asked only to remain unknown... And yet the perfume of Her holiness was so strong that it drew Me from Heaven...»

«Do You see a symbol of Your Mother in that flower?»

«Yes, I do, Thomas.»

«And do You think that our ancestors foresaw Her, when they praised the lily of the valley?» asks James of Alphaeus. «They compared Her then with other plants and flowers: with the rose, the olive-tree, and with the most gentle animals: turtle-doves, wood-pigeons...»

«They all ascribed to Her the most beautiful things they saw in creation. And She is really the Beauty of creation. But I would call Her Lily of the valley and peaceful Olive-tree, if I had to sing Her praises» and Jesus cheers up and brightens thinking of His Mother, and He quickens His pace to be alone...

They continue to walk, notwithstanding the heat of the day, because in the hollow of the valley there is a succession of trees protecting from the sun.

After some time Peter lengthens his stride and joins the Master. He calls Him in a low voice: «My Master!»

«My Peter!»

«Will I disturb You, if I come with You?»

«No, My friend. What have you so urgent to tell Me, that it compels you to come to your Master?»

«A question... Master, I am an inquisitive man...»

«So?» Jesus smiles looking at His apostle.

«And I like to know many things...»

«Which is a fault, My Peter.»

«I know... But I do not think it is a fault this time. If I wanted to know something unbecoming, or knavish actions so that I might criticise who did them, oh! in that case it would be a fault. But You know that I did not ask You whether Judas was somehow connected with Your being called to Bether and because...»

«But you were dying to know...»

«Yes. That's true. But it is a greater merit, isn't it?»

«It is a greater merit. As it is a great merit to control oneself. It proves in him, who behaves thus, real good progress in spiritual life, real active understanding and assimilation of the lessons of the Master.»

«Is that so? And are You glad?»

«Oh! Peter, why ask Me? I am more than happy.»

«Are You really? O my Master! Then is it Your poor Simon who makes You so happy?»

«Yes, it is. Did you not know?»

«I dared not believe it. But seeing You so happy, I got John to ask You yesterday. Because I thought that it might be Judas also who was improving... although I have no proof of that... But I may be a bad judge. John told me that You said that You are happy because there is one who is becoming holy... Just now You told me that You are happy because I am becoming better. Now I know. The one who makes You happy and cheerful is me, poor Simon... But now I wish my sacrifice could make Judas change. I am not envious. I would like everybody to be perfect, to make You perfectly happy. Shall I succeed?»

«Confide, Simon, confide and persevere.»

«I will! I certainly will! For Your sake... and for his as well. Because I am sure that he cannot be glad to be always like that. After all... he could be my son... H'm! Actually I prefer to be Marjiam's father! But... I will be a father to him, working to give him a soul worthy of You.»

«And of you, Simon» and Jesus bends and kisses his hair.

Peter is overjoyed... After some time he asks: «Are You not telling me anything else? Is there no more good news, a flower among the thorns, which You find everywhere?»

«Yes, there is. One of Joseph's friends who is coming to the Light.»

«Really? A member of the Sanhedrin?»

«Yes, but we must not tell anybody. We must pray and suffer for that purpose. Are you not asking Me who it is? Are you not anxious to know?»

«Very much so. But I am not going to ask You. A sacrifice for the unknown man.»

«May you be blessed, Simon! You are making Me really happy today. Continue like that and I will love you more and more and so will God. Now let us stop and wait for the others...»

411. In Jerusalem for Pentecost.

9th April 1946.

The city is full of people. The Temple is crowded. Jesus ascends to it as soon as He enters Jerusalem and He goes in through the gate near the Bethesda, that is, almost immediately, before the people realise that He is in Town and before the news may spread from the house where they leave their baggage and where they wash and tidy themselves, in order to enter the Temple clean and free from dust and perspiration.

There is the usual indecorous din of vendors and money-changers, and the usual kaleidoscope of colours and faces.

Jesus, with the apostles who have bought what is necessary for the offering, goes straight to the place of prayer and remains there for a long time. Of course, He is noticed by many people, both good and bad, and a whisper spreads like the wind and with the noise of leaves rustling in the wind, through the large outer yard, where people stop to pray. And when, after praying, He retraces His steps, a train of people, which becomes bigger and bigger, follows Him through the other atria, porches, yards, until they become a crowd, which surrounds Him and asks Him to speak.

«Another time, children! And in some other place!» says Jesus and He raises His arm to bless, trying to go away.

Scribes, Pharisees, doctors and their disciples, scattered among the people, sneer saying to one another sharp phrases, which are real mockery, such as: «Prudence is advising» or: «Eh! somewhat afraid...» or: «He has reached the age of reason» or also: «Not such a fool as we thought...» But the greater part, those who know and love Him or those who sincerely wish to know Him, and thus nurse no grudge against Him, insist in saying: «Are You going to deprive us of a feast in the Feast? Good Master, You cannot do that! Many of us have made sacrifices to remain here waiting for You...» and some hiss the mockers or give them sharp answers.

It is very obvious that the mass would be ready to overwhelm the wicked

minority, who, shrewd and crafty as they are, take the hint, and they not only become quiet, but endeavour to go away. And although they are in the enclosure of the Temple, many do not hesitate to scoff at or hurl abuse at those who are departing, whilst others, mainly elderly people, and thus more reflective, ask Jesus: «Since You know, please tell us, what will happen to this place, to this town, to the whole of Israel, who will not surrender to the Voice of the Lord?»

Jesus looks at those grey or white haired heads pitifully and replies:

«Jeremiah told you what will happen to those who reply to the flash of divine wrath by increasing their sins, and consider divine mercy as a proof of weakness on God's side. Because *God is not to be derided, children*. You, as the Eternal God said through the lips of Jeremiah, are like clay in the hands of the potter, as clay are those who consider themselves mighty, as clay are the inhabitants of this place and those of the royal palace. There is no human power that can resist God. And if the clay resists the potter and wants to take strange horrible shapes, the potter turns it into a handful of clay again and starts afresh and works it into another vessel until it realises that the potter is the stronger and thus it yields to his will. And it may also happen that the vessel breaks into pieces, because it persists in not being modelled, as it refuses the water with which the potter moistens it in order to be able to shape it without cracks. The potter then throws the refractory clay and the useless unworkable bits and pieces into the garbage-can and he takes fresh clay and moulds it as he thinks best. Does the Prophet not say so when explaining the symbol of the potter and the clay vessel? That is what he says. And repeating the words of the Lord, he says: *“As the clay is in the potter's hand, so you, Israel, are in the hand of God.”* And the Lord adds, as a warning to those who are refractory, that only penance and repentance, when God reproaches man, can change the decree of God to punish a rebellious people.

Israel did not repent. Thus the threats of God have struck Israel many times. Israel is not repenting even now that not a prophet, but One Who is more than a prophet speaks to her. And God Who has had supreme mercy on Israel and has sent Me, now says to you: “As you do not listen to My own Voice, I will regret the good I have done to you and I will prepare a disaster for you.” And I, Who am Mercy, although I know that I am speaking in vain, I shout to Israel: “Each one of you, turn back from your evil ways. Amend your conduct and your inclinations. So that, when the plan of God will be carried out against the guilty Nation, at least the better ones in it may preserve their spirits free from sin in the

general loss of goods, of freedom, of union, and united to God they may not lose the eternal goods as they lost the earthly ones.”

The visions of prophets have always one aim: to warn men of what may happen. And it is stated by the symbol of the earthenware vessel, broken in the presence of the people, what is in store for towns and kingdoms that do not surrender to the Lord, and...»

The elders, scribes, doctors and Pharisees, who had gone away previously, must have gone to inform the Temple guards and the magistrates in charge of order. And one of them, followed by a handful of comical cardboard soldiers, whose faces only seem belligerent, as they are a mixture of stupidity with a little malice and much harshness, not to say criminality, comes towards Jesus. The Master is speaking leaning against a column of the porch of Pagans and as the magistrate cannot get through the crowds, which have formed an impenetrable circle round Jesus, he shouts: «Go away! Or I will get my soldiers to throw You out of the enclosure...»

«Ugh! The big green flies! Heroes against lambs! Can you not go in and put in prison those who have turned Jerusalem into a brothel, and the Temple into a market? Go away, you chicken-hearted man, go away and stay with beech-martens... Ugh! Ugh!» The people turn against the grotesque soldiers and make it clear that they will not let the Master be insulted.

«I am carrying out the instructions I received...» says apologetically the leader of those... policemen.

«You are carrying out Satan's instructions and you do not realise that. Go away now, and implore God's mercy as you dared insult and threaten the Master! You dare not touch the Master! Is that clear to you? You are our oppressors, He is the Friend of the poor. You are our corruptors, He is our holy Master. You are our ruin, He is our Salvation. You are perfidious, He is good. Go away, or we shall do to you what Mattathias did at Modein. We will hurl you down the slope of Moriah like idolatric altars, and we will cleanse the place you have desecrated, washing it with your blood, and the feet of the only Holy Man in Israel will tread upon that blood to go to the Holy of Holies and reign there, as He deserves! Away from here! You and your masters! Away, you hired ruffians serving hired assassins...»

It is a frightful uproar... Roman guards rush from the Antonia led by an elderly severe hasty non-commissioned officer.

«Make room, you stinkers! What's happening? Are you tearing one another to pieces over some of your scabby lambs?»

«They are rebelling against the soldiers...» the magistrate endeavours to explain.

«By invincible Mars! These... soldiers? Ah! Ah! Go and fight cockroaches, you wine-cellar warrior.» He then addresses the people saying: «Tell me...»

«They did not want to let the Galilean Rabbi speak. They wanted to drive Him away. Perhaps they wanted to capture Him...»

«The Galilean Rabbi? Non licet. I say to you in the language of Rome the word of John Decollate. Ah! Ah! March to your kennel you and your curs. And tell the mastiffs to lie down as well. The She-Wolf knows how to tear to pieces those, too... Is that clear? Rome only has the right to judge. And You, Galilean... You may go on telling Your stories... Ah! Ah!» and he turns round all of one piece, his breastplate shining in the sun, and goes away.

«Exactly as with Jeremiah...»

«As with all the prophets, you ought to say...»

«But God triumphs just the same.»

«Master, go on speaking. The vipers have run away.»

«No, let Him go, lest the new Pashhurs should come back with greater strength and put Him in chains...»

«There is no such danger... While the lion roars the hyenas do not come out...»

The people speak making their comments in utter confusion.

«You are wrong» says an unctuous Pharisee enveloped in his pompous mantle, followed by his likes and by some doctors of the Law. «You are wrong. You must not think that the entire caste is like some of its members. Eh! Eh! There is good and bad on every tree.»

«Yes. In fact figs are generally sweet. But if they are unripe or too ripe they are sour or acid. You are acid. Like the figs of the very bad basket of the prophet Jeremiah» says one from the middle of the crowd: a man I do not know, but he must be well known to the crowds and is also a mighty one, because I see the people wink approvingly while the Pharisee pockets the blow without reacting. On the contrary, in an even more sugary manner, he turns towards the Master

and says to Him: «A wonderful subject for Your Wisdom. Rabbi, do speak to us on this subject. Your elucidations are so... new... so... learned... We savour them with greedy appetite.»

Jesus stares at the Pharisaic champion and then replies to him: «You, Helkai, and your friends have also another unavowed appetite. But you will be given also that food... which is even more acid than figs. And it will contaminate your hearts as sour figs infect bowels.»

«No Master. I swear to it in the name of the living God! My friends and I hunger only to hear You speak... God sees whether...»

«That's enough. Honest people need not swear. Their deeds are their oath and witness. But I shall not speak of the very good and very bad figs...»

«Why not, Master? Are You afraid that facts may contradict Your explanations?»

«Oh! no! On the contrary...»

«So You foresee torment, shame, sword, plague, famine for us?»

«All that and even more.»

«Even more? What? So God no longer loves us?»

«He loves you so much that He fulfilled His promise.»

«You? Are You His promise?»

«I am.»

«In that case, when are You going to establish Your Kingdom?»

«Its foundations have already been laid.»

«Where?»

«In the hearts of good people.»

«But that is not a kingdom. That is teaching!»

«As My Kingdom is a spiritual one, spirits are its subjects. And spirits need no palaces, houses, armies, walls. They need to know only the Word of God and practise it. Which is happening in good people.»

«But can You speak that Word? Who authorises You?»

«The possession.»

«Which possession?»

«The possession of the Word. I give what I am. One who has life, can give life. One who has money, can give money. By My eternal Nature I have the Word that translates the Divine Thought and I give the Word, because the Love to make known the Thought of the Most High, Who is My Father, urges Me to give that gift.»

«Mind what You say! It's an audacious language! It may be detrimental to You!»

«It would be more detrimental to lie, because it would imply perverting My Nature and disowning Him from Whom I proceed.»

«So You are God, the Word of God?»

«I am.»

«And You say so like that? In the presence of so many witnesses who could report You?»

«The Truth does not lie. The Truth does not make calculations. The Truth is heroic.»

«And that is the truth?»

«The Truth is He Who is speaking to you. Because the Word of God translates the Thought of God, and God is Truth.»

The crowds are all ears, paying attention, in silence, to the discussion, which, however, is carried on without harshness. More people have rushed there from other parts, and the yard is crammed: hundreds of faces all turned towards one spot. And more faces, with stretched necks, appear from the openings leading to this yard, anxious to see and hear...

Helkai, the member of the Sanhedrin, and his friends look at one another... A rapid exchange of anxious glances. But they control themselves. Nay, an old doctor asks very kindly: «What should we do to avoid the punishments that You foresee?»

«You ought to follow Me, and above all believe Me. And even more: love Me.»

«Are You a mascot?»

«No. I am the Saviour.»

«But You have no armies...»

«I have Myself. Remember, you should all remember, for your own sake and out of pity for your souls, remember the words of the Lord to Moses and Aaron, when they were still in the land of Egypt: “Each man of the people of God must take a lamb without blemish, a male one year old. One animal for each household, and if the number of persons in the family is too small to eat all the animal, they must join with their neighbour. And you shall immolate it on the fourteenth day of the month of Abib, which is now called Nisan, and with the blood of the immolated animal you shall wet the doorposts and the lintel of your houses. And the same night you shall eat the flesh roasted over the fire, with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. And you shall burn what might be left over. And you shall eat it with a girdle round your waist, sandals on your feet, a staff in your hand, you shall eat it hastily, because it is the passover of the Lord. And that night I will pass and strike down all the first-born of man and animal, that are in the houses not marked with the blood of the lamb.” At present, in the new passover of God, the truest passover, because God really passes amongst you in a visible manner, recognizable by His signs, *those will be saved who are marked with the salutary mark of the Blood of the Lamb*. Because, truly, you will all be marked with it. *But only those who love the Lamb and will love His Sign, will receive salvation from that Blood*. With regard to the others it will be the mark of Cain. And you know that Cain no longer deserved to see the face of the Lord and had no more peace. And chased by remorse, by punishment, by Satan, his cruel king, he became a fugitive and wanderer over the Earth as long as he lived. He is a really great figure of the People who will strike the new Abel...»

«Ezekiel also speaks of the Tau... Do You think that Your Sign is Ezekiel's Tau?»

«It is.»

«So You accuse us because there is abomination in Jerusalem?»

«I wish I could not do so. But it is so.»

«And are there no sinners amongst those marked with the Tau? Can You swear to that?»

«I do not swear anything. But I say that if there are sinners among those who are marked, their punishment will be even more dreadful, because adulterers of the

spirit, abjurers, the killers of God, who become so after being His followers, will be the greatest in Hell.»

«But those who cannot believe that You are God, will not commit sin. They will be justified...»

«No. If you had not known Me, if you had not been able to verify My deeds, if you had not had the opportunity to examine My words, you would not be guilty. If you were not doctors in Israel, you would not be in the wrong. *But you know the Scriptures and you see My works.* You can make a comparison. And if you do so honestly, you will see Me in the words of the Scripture and you will see the words of the Scripture in Me, translated into My actions. *Thus you will not be justified for failing to recognise Me and for hating Me.* There are too many idols, too much abomination, too much fornication, where God only should be. And the same applies to every place where you are. Salvation consists in disowning all that and in accepting the Truth that speaks to you. Consequently, where you kill or you try to kill, you will be killed. And that is why you will be judged at the border of Israel, where all human power lapses, and the Eternal Father only is the Judge of His creatures.»

«Why do You speak so, Lord? You are severe.»

«I am truthful. *I am the Light. The Light was sent to illuminate Darkness.* But the Light must shine freely. The Most High would have sent His Light in vain, if He had hidden that Light under a bushel. Not even men do so when they light a lamp, otherwise there would be no sense in lighting it. If they light it, they do so that it may give light and those in the house may see. I have come to give light to the darkened earthly house of My Father, so that those who are in it may see. *And the Light shines.* And bless it, if its most pure beams disclose reptiles, scorpions, traps, cobwebs, cracks in the walls. It does so for your sake, to give you the opportunity to know yourselves, to cleanse yourselves, driving away harmful animals, that is, passions and sins, so that you may rebuild yourselves before it is too late, and you may see where you set your foot: on Satan's trap, before you fall into it. *But in order to see, in addition to a clear light, one needs a clear eye.* No light can illuminate an eye that a disease has covered with pus. *Cleanse your eyes and your spirits, so that the Light may descend into you.* Why perish in Darkness when the Most Good God sends you Light and Medicine to cure you? *It is not too late yet. In the time still left to you, come to the Light, the Truth, the Life.* Come to your Saviour Who stretches His arms to you, and opens His heart to you, imploring you to receive Him for your own eternal good.»

Jesus is really imploring, yearning lovingly, and nothing but love emanates from Him... Even the most stubborn beasts, even those who are most intoxicated with hatred, perceive so, and their weapons avow defeat and their poison fails to spit out its acid bitterness.

They look at one another. Then Helkai speaks on behalf of everybody: «You have spoken the truth, Master! I beg You to accept the banquet which I offer to honour You.»

«The only honour I ask for, is to conquer your souls. Leave Me in My poverty...»

«You will not offend Me by refusing?!»

«No offence. I beg you to leave Me with My friends.»

«They are invited as well, who could doubt it? They are invited with You. A great honour for my house!... You go to other great people! Why not come to Helkai?»

«Well... I will come. But, believe Me, in the secret of your house I will not be able to speak words different from those that I have spoken here, among the people.»

«Neither will I! Nor my friends! Do You perhaps doubt it?...»

Jesus looks at him. He then says: «I doubt only what I do not know. But I do know the thoughts of men. Let us go to your house... Peace to those who have listened to Me.»

And beside Helkai He directs His steps out of the Temple, followed by the train of His apostles mixed, but not enthusiastic about it, with Helkai's friends.

412. Jesus at the Banquet of Helkai, the Pharisee and Member of the Sanhedrin.

10th April 1946.

Jesus enters the house of His host, not far from the Temple, towards the district at the foot of the Tophet. It is the decorous, rather austere house of a strict

observant, nay, of an exaggerated observant. I believe that even nails have been placed in number and position as prescribed by one of the six hundred and thirteen precepts. There is no design on the cloths, not one ornament on the walls, not a knick-knack... not one of the little things, which in the houses of Joseph and Nicodemus and of the very Pharisees in Capernaum, are present to decorate them. Here... the spirit of the owner breathes in every part. It is icy, so bare it is of ornament. The dark heavy furniture, shaped like sarcophagi, makes it dull. It is repellent. A house which does not welcome, but is hostile to those entering it.

And Helkai points it out boasting. «See, Master, how observant I am? Everything says so. Look: curtains without any design, unadorned furniture, no sculptured vases or chandeliers imitating flowers. There is everything, but everything complies with the precept: “You shall not make yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything in heaven or on the earth or in the waters under the earth.” And it is so in the house and also with regard to my garments and those of the household. For instance, I do not approve of the needlework on the tunic and mantle of this disciple of Yours (the Iscariot). You will object: “Many wear them.” Or: “It is only a Greek fret.” All right. But with those angles and curves, it is too strong a reminiscence of the signs of Egypt. Horrible! Diabolic cyphers! Necromantic signs! Beelzebub's monogram! It is not an honour to you, Judas of Simon, to wear them, or to You, Master, to allow him.»

Judas replies with a sly sarcastic laugh. Jesus replies humbly: «Rather than the signs of their clothes, I watch that there are no signs of horror in their hearts. But I will ask, nay I ask My disciple now, to wear less ornate garments in order not to scandalise anybody.»

Judas has a good gesture: «In actual fact my Master has told me several times that He would prefer my clothes to be more simple. But I... I did what I liked, because I like to be dressed thus.»

«Which is bad, very bad. It's very bad that a Galilean should teach a Judaeen, particularly with regard to you, as you were one of the Temple... Oh!» Helkai appears to be utterly scandalised and his friends join in with him.

Judas is already tired of being kind. He retorts: «Oh! in that case there are many pompous things that you members of the Sanhedrin should forgo! If you had to remove all the drawings with which you have covered the faces of your souls, you would really look ugly.»

«How can you say that?»

«As one who knows you.»

«Master! Do You hear him?»

«I do, and I say that *humility is necessary on both sides, as well as truth. And you ought to be indulgent to one another. God only is perfect.*»

«Well said, Rabbi!» says one of the friends... A feeble solitary voice in the group of Pharisees and doctors.

«It's wrong, instead» replies Helkai. «Deuteronomy is clear in its curses. It says: “A curse on the man who carves or casts an idol, a detestable thing, the work of a craftsman's hands and...”»

«But these are clothes, they are not sculptures» replies Judas.

«Be silent. Your Master will speak. Helkai, be fair and make the necessary distinction. Cursed be he who makes idols, not he who makes patterns copying the beautiful things which the Creator put in creation. We pick flowers to adorn...»

«I don't pick any and I do not want to see any room adorned with them. Woe to my women if they commit such a sin in their rooms. God only is to be admired.»

«Quite right. God only. But we can admire God also in a flower, confessing that He is the Craftsman of the flower.»

«No, no! Heathenism! Heathenism!»

«Judith adorned herself, so did Esther for a holy purpose...»

«Females! And a female is always a despicable thing. But I beg You, Master, go into the dining-room, while I withdraw for a moment as I have to speak to my friends.»

Jesus agrees without discussion.

«Master... I am breathing with difficulty!...» exclaims Peter.

«Why? Are you not feeling well?» ask some apostles.

«No, but I feel uncomfortable... like one who has fallen into a trap.»

«Do not get excited. And be very prudent, all of you» advises Jesus.

They remain standing in a group, until the Pharisees come in followed by the servants.

«Let us sit down at once. We have a meeting and we cannot be late» orders Helkai. And he assigns the seats while the servants serve the food.

Jesus is beside Helkai and Peter is at His side. Helkai offers the food and the meal begins in deathlike silence... They then begin to speak and the first words, of course, are addressed to Jesus, because the Twelve are neglected, as if they were not there.

The first question is asked by a doctor of the Law. «Master, are You sure of what You say?»

«I do not say so by Myself. The prophets said so before I was among you.»

«The prophets!... Since You deny that we are the holy ones, You may accept as true my assertion that our prophets may be braggarts.»

«The prophets are saints.»

«But we are not, are we? But remember that Zephaniah joins prophets and priests together when condemning Jerusalem: “Her prophets are braggarts, they are impostors, and her priests profane the holy things, they do violence to the Law.” You continuously reproach us with that. But if You accept the latter words of the prophet, you must accept also the former and thus admit that one cannot rely on the words of braggarts.»

«Rabbi of Israel, reply to My question. When a few lines later Zephaniah says: “Shout for joy, daughter of Zion... the Lord has repealed your sentence... the King of Israel is in your midst”, does your heart accept those words?»

«It is my glory to repeat them to myself dreaming of that day.»

«But they are the words of a prophet, of a braggart, so...»

The doctor of the Law remains dumbfounded for a moment. One of his friends assists him. «No one can doubt that Israel will reign. Not one, but all the prophets, and the patriarchs before the prophets, have mentioned that promise of God.»

«And not one of the patriarchs and prophets has failed to point out Who I am.»

«Oh! Well! But we have no proof! You may be a braggart as well. What proof

can You give us that You are the Messiah, the Son of God? Give me a time-limit, that I may judge.»

«I do not refer you to My Death described by David and Isaiah, but to My Resurrection.»

«You? Rise again? And who will make You rise again?»

«Not certainly you. Neither the Pontiff, nor the monarch, nor the castes, nor the people. I will rise again by Myself.»

«Do not blaspheme, Galilean, and do not lie!»

«I am doing nothing but pay honour to God and speak the truth. And with Zephaniah I say to you: “Wait for Me at My resurrection.” Up to that time you may doubt, you all may doubt and work to make the people dubious. But it will no longer be possible for you to feel dubious when the Eternal Living One, after redeeming mankind, will rise by Himself from the dead to die no longer. Intangible Judge, perfect King, with His sceptre and Justice He will rule and judge until the end of the world and will continue to reign forever in Heaven.»

«Do You not realize that You are speaking to doctors and members of the Sanhedrin?» asks Helkai.

«And so what? You ask Me questions, and I reply to them. You show desire to learn, and I explain the truth to you. After calling to My mind the curse of Deuteronomy, because of a drawing on a garment, you are not going to remind Me of another curse of the same Book: “A curse on him who strikes down his neighbour in secret.”»

«I am not striking You down. I am giving You food.»

«No. But your insidious questions are blows in the back. Be careful, Helkai. Because God's maledictions follow one another, and the one I just quoted, is followed by another one: “A curse on him who accepts a bribe to take an innocent life.”»

«In this case You are accepting the gift, since You are my guest.»

«I do not even condemn culprits, if they are repentant.»

«Then, You are not just.»

«Yes, it is just. Because He considers that repentance deserves forgiveness, and

therefore He does not condemn» says the man who already consented to Jesus in the hall of the house.

«Will you be quiet, Daniel! Do you think you know better than we do? Or are you seduced by One upon Whom much is still to be decided and Who does nothing to help us decide in His favour?» says one of the doctors.

«I know that you are the wise ones and I am a simple Judaeon and I do not even know why you often want me to be with you...»

«Because you are a relative! That is easily understood! And I want those who become my relatives to be holy and wise! I cannot allow ignorance in the Scriptures, in the Law, in Halacha, Midrash and Haggada. And I cannot suffer that. Everything is to be known and complied with...»

«And I am grateful to you for so much attention. But I, a simple tiller, once I undeservedly became your relative, I have been anxious about nothing but to know the Scriptures and the Prophets, to have comfort in my life. And with the simplicity of an unlearned person, I confess that in the Rabbi I recognize the Messiah, preceded by His Precursor, who pointed Him out to us... And you cannot deny that John was possessed by the Spirit of God.»

There is silence. They do not want to deny that the Baptist was infallible. Neither do they wish to admit that he was.

Then another one says: «Well... Let us say that the Precursor is the precursor of that angel that God sends to prepare the way to Christ. And... let us admit that in the Galilean there is enough holiness to consider Him such an angel. After Him there will come the times of the Messiah. Do you not think that this idea of mine is conciliative for everybody? Will you agree to it, Helkai? And what about you, my friends? And You, Nazarene?»

«No.», «No.», «No.» Three definite noes.

«Why? Why do you not approve of it?»

Helkai is silent. His friends also say nothing. Jesus only replies frankly: «Because I cannot approve of an error. I am more than an angel. The Baptist was the angel, the Precursor of the Christ, and I am the Christ.»

There is a long deathlike silence. Helkai, his elbow resting on his couch and his cheek leaning on his hand, is pensive, severe, as uncommunicative as his whole house.

Jesus turns round, looks at him, then says: «Helkai, do not confuse the Law and the Prophets with trifles!»

«I see that You have read my thought. But You cannot deny that You have sinned infringing the precept.»

«As you, and by craft, and thus with a bigger sin, have infringed the duty of a host, and you did so deliberately, you distracted My attention and you sent Me here, while you were purifying yourself with your friends, and when you came back you begged us to make haste, because you had a meeting, and you did all that in order to be able to say to Me: “You have sinned.”»

«You could have reminded me of my duty to let You have what was necessary for Your purification.»

«I could remind you of many things, but it would only serve to make you more intolerant and hostile.»

«No. Tell me. We want to listen to You and...»

«And inform the Chief Priests accusing Me. That is why I reminded you of the last two curses. I am aware of it and I know you. I am here defenceless among you. I am here, isolated from the people who love Me and before whom you dare not assail Me. But I am not afraid. I do not resort to compromises, neither do I act in a cowardly way. And I tell you your sin, yours and of your entire caste, O Pharisees, the false pure ones of the Law, O doctors, the false wise ones, who intentionally confuse and mix the true and the false good, who impose on other people and exact from them perfection even in exterior things, while you exact nothing from yourselves. You blame Me, together with your host and Mine, for not washing Myself before dining. You know that I have just come from the Temple, which one enters after being purified of dust and the dirt of the road. Do you want perhaps to confess that the Holy Place is contamination?»

«We purified ourselves before the meal.»

«And we were ordered: “Go there and wait.” And later: “Let us sit down without any delay.” So on your walls free from designs, there was a design: your plan to deceive Me. Which hand wrote on your walls the reason for a possible accusation? Your spirit or another power, which controls your spirit and to which you listen? Now listen, all of you.»

Jesus stands up and with His hands resting on the edge of the table He begins His speech:

«You Pharisees wash the outside of the cup and of the plate, and you wash your hands and feet, as if plate and cup, hands and feet were to enter your spirits that you love to proclaim pure and perfect. But it is not for you, but for God to proclaim that. Well, listen to what God thinks of your spirits. He thinks that they are full of falsehood, of filth and robbery, they are full of iniquity and nothing from the outside can corrupt what is already corrupted.»

He lifts His right hand from the table and begins unintentionally to gesticulate with it, while He continues:

«Who made your spirits, as He made your bodies, can He not exact at least the same respect for your inside as you have for your outside? O stupid people, who confuse the two values and invert their importance, will the Most High not want a greater care for the spirit, which was made in His likeness and loses eternal Life through corruption, than He exacts for a hand or a foot, the dirt of which can be cleansed easily and which, even if they remained dirty, would not affect your interior cleanliness? And can God worry about the neatness of a cup or a tray, which are things without a soul and cannot influence your souls?»

I read your thought, Simon Boetos. No, it does not stand. You do not carry out those purifications thinking of your health, as a protection for your bodies, your lives. Carnal sins, nay the sins of gluttony, of intemperance, of lust are certainly more harmful to the body than a little dust on your hands or on a plate. And yet you commit them without worrying about protecting your lives or the safety of your relatives. And you commit sins of various kinds, because besides polluting your souls and bodies, squandering your wealth, lacking respect to your relatives, you offend the Lord by desecrating your bodies, the temple of your souls, and in that temple there ought to be the throne of the Holy Spirit; and you offend the Lord also because you think that you have to protect by yourselves your bodies from diseases caused by a little dust, as if God could not intervene to protect you from physical trouble, if you had recourse to Him with pure spirit.

But He Who created the inside did not perhaps create the outside also, and vice versa? And is the inside not nobler and more marked by divine likeness? Do then good works worthy of God, not mean actions that do not rise from the dust for which and of which they are made, of the poor dust, which is man considered as an animal creature, mud formed into shape and which will become

dust again, dust which the wind of time disperses. Do lasting works, that is holy regal works, crowned with divine blessing. Be charitable, give alms, be honest and pure in your deeds and in your intentions, and without resorting to ablutionary waters, everything will be pure in you.

What do you think? That you are in order because you pay tithes on spices? Woe to you, Pharisees, who pay the tithes of mint and rue, of mustard and cumin, of fennel and every other kind of herbs, and then you neglect the justice and love of God. It is your duty to pay tithes and it is to be done. But there are higher duties and they are to be done as well. Woe to those who respect exterior things and neglect the interior ones based on the love of God and of our neighbour. Woe to you, Pharisees, who love the first seats in synagogues and meetings, and like to be greeted obsequiously in the market squares and you do not worry about doing deeds that can give you a seat in Heaven and make you deserve to be revered by the angels. You are like hidden sepulchres, which do not disgust him who passes near them without noticing them, but would give him a shiver of horror if he saw what is closed in them. But God sees the most secret things also and cannot be deceived when He judges.»

Jesus is interrupted by a doctor of the Law who also stands up to contradict Him. «Master, You are offending us as well, by speaking so; and that is not advantageous to You, because we have to judge You.»

«No. Not you. You cannot judge Me. You will be judged, you are not the judges, and it is God Who will judge you. You can speak and utter sounds with your lips. But even the most powerful voice cannot reach up to Heaven or resound all over the world. After a short space it is silence... And after a short time it is oblivion. *But the judgement of God is a lasting voice that is not subject to oblivion.* Ages have gone by since God judged Lucifer and Adam. But the voice of the judgement has not gone out. And its consequences still last. And if I have come to bring back Grace to men, through the perfect Sacrifice, the sentence on Adam's action remains what it is, and it will always be called "Original sin." Men will be redeemed, they will be washed with a purification exceeding every other one, but they will be born with that stain, because God has decided that that stain is to be in every man born of woman, with the exception of Him, Who was made not by deed of man, but by the Holy Spirit, and with the exception of the Preserved Woman and the Presanctified Man, virgins forever. The Former, that She might be the Virgin Mother of God, the latter that he might be the precursor of the Innocent, being born already pure,

through a pre-fruit of the infinite merits of the Saviour Redeemer.

And I tell you that God judges you. And He judges you saying: “Woe to you, doctors of the Law, because you load people with unbearable weights, *turning into a punishment the fatherly Decalogue of the Most High to His People.*” He had given it out of love and for love, so that man might be supported by a fair guide, man, the eternal imprudent ignorant child. And the loving leading-strings, by which God supported His creatures, so that they might proceed along His way and arrive at His heart, have been replaced by you with mountains of heavy, sharp harassing stones, a labyrinth of prescriptions, a nightmare of scruples, whereby man loses heart, becomes confused, stops, fears God as an enemy. *You prevent hearts from going to God. You separate the Father from His children.* Through your impositions, you deny such sweet, blessed true Paternity. You, however, do not even touch with your fingers those weights, which you load on other people. You consider yourselves justified, simply because you gave them. But, O fools, do you not know that you will be judged for what you considered necessary for salvation? Do you not know that God will say to you: “You said that your word was sacred and just. Well, I judge it such as well. And since you imposed it on everybody and you judged your brothers according to how it was accepted and practised, now I judge you by your own word. And since you did not do what you said was to be done, be damned.”?

Woe to you who build sepulchres to the prophets killed by your fathers. What? Do you think that you will thus reduce the gravity of your fathers' sin or that you will cancel it in the eyes of posterity? No. On the contrary you give evidence of such deeds of your fathers. Not only, but you approve of them, and you are ready to imitate them and build later a sepulchre to the persecuted prophet, so that you say to yourselves: “We have honoured him.” Hypocrites! That is why the Wisdom of God said: “I will send them prophets and apostles. And they will kill some and persecute some, so that it may be possible to call this generation to account for the blood of all the prophets, shed from the creation of the world onwards, from the blood of Abel down to the blood of Zacharias, slain between the Altar and the Sanctuary.” Yes, I solemnly tell you that *of all that blood of saints an account will be asked of this generation*, which cannot tell where God is, and it persecutes and distresses the just who are a living comparison for their injustice. Woe to you, doctors of the Law, who have usurped the key of science and have closed its temple, in order not to enter it and be judged by it, neither have you allowed others to enter it. Because you know that if the people were taught the true Science, that is, Holy Wisdom, they could judge you. *You,*

therefore, prefer them to be ignorant that they may not judge you. And you hate Me because I am the Word of Wisdom and before the time you would like to close Me in prison, in a sepulchre, so that I may no longer speak.

But I will speak as long as My Father likes Me to speak. And afterwards My deeds will speak more than My words. And My merits will speak even more than My deeds, and the world will be taught and will know, and it will judge you. The first judgement is upon you. Then the second will come: an individual judgement at the death of each of you. And then the last one: The Universal one. And you will remember this day and these days, and you, you alone will know the terrible God, Whom you have striven to show as a nightmarish vision to the spirits of simple people, whilst you, inside your sepulchres, derided Him and you neither respected nor obeyed His commandments, from the first and main one: the commandment of love, to the last one given on Sinai.

It is of no avail to you, Helkai, that you have no images in your house. Neither is it of any avail to you all, that you have no sculptures in your houses. Inside your hearts you have an idol, several idols. *The idol whereby you believe that you are gods, the idols of your concupiscence.* Come, My disciples, let us go.»

And preceded by the Twelve He goes out last.

Silence...

Those remaining clamour shouting all together: «We must persecute Him, catch Him at fault and find counts of indictment! We must kill Him!»

Then silence again.

Then, while two of them go away disgusted with the hatred and intentions of the Pharisees – one is Helkai's relative and the other the man who defended the Master twice – those left ask one another: «But how?»

There is silence once again.

Then with a hoarse laughter Helkai says: «We will have to talk Judas of Simon round...»

«Of course! It's a good idea! But you offended him!...»

«I'll see to that» says the one whom Jesus called Simon Boetos. «Eleazar of Annas and I... We will entrap him...»

«Some promises...»

«A little fear...»

«Much money...»

«No. Not much... Promises of much money...»

«And then?»

«What do you mean: and then?»

«Eh! Then. When it is all done, what shall we give him?»

«Nothing! Death. So... he will not speak any more» slowly and cruelly says Helkai.

«Oh! death...»

«Are you horrified? Go away! If we kill the Nazarene Who... is a just man... we can kill the Iscariot as well, as he is a sinner...»

There is hesitation...

But Helkai, standing up, says: «We will hear also what Annas says... And you will see that... he will say that it is a good idea. And you will come, too... Oh! you will certainly come...»

They all go out after their host who goes away saying: «You will come... You will come!»

413. At Bethany.

11th April 1946.

Sunset reddens the sky when Jesus arrives at Bethany. His hot dusty apostles follow Him. And Jesus and the apostles are the only ones to brave the burning road – as hot as a furnace – which receives little shade from the trees extending from the Mount of Olives to the slopes of Bethany. Summer burns, but hatred rages even more. The fields are bare and scorched they are like furnaces reverberating blasts of heat. But the souls of Jesus' enemies are even more devoid – I do not mean of love – but of honesty, of human morals, raging with hatred... And there is but one home, one shelter for Jesus: Bethany. There is love, relief, protection and loyalty there... The persecuted Pilgrim directs His

steps there, in His white garment, sad of countenance, with the tired step of one who cannot stop, being urged on by enemies close behind, with the resigned look of one who already contemplates death approaching every hour, at every step, and which one accepts, out of obedience to God...

The house, in the middle of its large garden, is closed and silent, awaiting cooler hours. The garden is empty and deserted, and the sun only reigns despotically there. Thomas calls in his loud baritone voice.

A curtain is drawn, a face looks out... Then a cry: «The Master!» and the servants rush out, followed by the surprised mistresses, who were certainly not expecting Jesus at that hot hour of the day.

«Rabboni!», «My Lord!» Martha and Mary greet from afar, already stooping, ready to prostrate themselves, as they do, as soon as the gate is opened and Jesus is no longer separated from them.

«Martha, Mary: peace to you and to your house.»

«Peace to You, Master and Lord... But why at this hour?» ask the sisters, dismissing the servants so that Jesus may speak freely.

«To rest My body and soul where I am not hated...» sadly says Jesus, stretching out His hands, as if to say: «Do you want Me?» and He strives to smile, but His very sad smile is belied by His sorrowful eyes.

«Have they hurt You?» asks Mary flushing.

«What happened to You?» asks Martha and she adds maternally: «Come, I will give You some refreshment. How long have You been walking, since You are so tired?»

«Since dawn... and I can say without stopping, because the short rest in the house of Helkai, the member of the Sanhedrin, was worse than a long journey...»

«Was it there that they grieved You?»

«Yes... and previously at the Temple...»

«But why did You go to that snake?» asks Mary.

«Because if I had refused to go, it would have served to justify his hatred, which would have accused Me of despising the members of the Sanhedrin. But now...»

whether I go or not, the measure of Pharisaic hatred is full... and there will be no truce...»

«Have we got to that? Stay with us, Master. They will not hurt You here...»

«I would fail in My mission... Many souls are waiting for their Saviour. I must go...»

«But they will prevent You from going!»

«No. They will persecute Me by letting Me go, so that they may watch every step of Mine, allowing Me to speak to study every word, watching over Me as bloodhounds track a quarry, so that they may have... something, which may look like a fault... and everything will serve...»

Martha, who is always so respectful, is so moved to pity, that she lifts her hand to caress His emaciated cheek, but she stops blushing and says: «Forgive me! I felt sorry for You as I do for our Lazarus! Forgive me, Lord, for loving You as a suffering brother!»

«I am the suffering brother... Love Me with pure sisterly love... But what is Lazarus doing?»

«He is languishing, Lord...» replies Mary and this avowal together with the grief of seeing her Master so distressed makes her shed the tears already welling in her eyes.

«Do not weep, Mary, neither for him nor for Me. We are doing the divine will. One should weep over those who do not know how to do that will...»

Mary bends to take Jesus' hand and kisses the tips of His fingers.

They have meanwhile arrived at the house and as they enter they go to Lazarus at once, while the apostles rest refreshing themselves with what the servants offer them.

Jesus bends over Lazarus, who is becoming more and more emaciated, and kisses him to relieve the sadness of His dear friend.

«Master, how much You love me! You did not even wait until evening to come to me. In this heat...»

«My dear friend, I enjoy your company and you enjoy Mine. The rest does not matter.»

«That is true. It is nothing. Even my suffering no longer matters to me... Now I know why I suffer and what I can achieve by suffering» and Lazarus smiles an intimate spiritual smile.

«Yes, it is so, Master. One could almost say that our Lazarus rejoices at being ill and...» a sob breaks Martha's voice and she becomes silent.

«Come on, you may as well say it: at death. Master, tell them that they must help me, as the Levites help the priests.»

«To do what, My friend?»

«To consume the sacrifice...»

«And yet, up till recently, you trembled at the idea of death! So you no longer love us? You no longer love the Master? Do you not want to serve Him?...» asks Mary, who is stronger but pale with grief, and she caresses the yellowish hand of her brother.

«And you are asking me, just you, ardent and generous soul? Am I not your brother? Have I not the same blood as you have, and the same holy loves: Jesus, souls, and you, my beloved sisters?... But since Passover my soul has received a great word. And I love death. My Lord, I offer it to You, for Your own intentions.»

«So you are not going to ask Me to cure you any longer?»

«No, Rabboni. I ask You to bless me that I may be able to suffer... and die... and if I am not asking for too much... to redeem... You said so...»

«I did. And I bless you to give you all the necessary strength.» And Jesus imposes His hands on him and then kisses him.

«We will be together and You will teach me...»

«Not just now, Lazarus. I am not staying. I have come only for a few hours. I am leaving tonight.»

«But why?» ask the three disappointed relatives.

«Because I cannot stay... I will come back in autumn. And then I will stay here for a long time and I will do much here... and in the surroundings...»

There is sad silence. Then Martha begs Him: «At least take some rest, some refreshment...»

«Nothing will refresh Me more than your love. Let My apostles rest and let Me stay here, with you, thus, in peace...»

Martha goes out weeping, she then comes back with some cups of cold milk and some early fruit...

«The apostles have had something to eat, and tired as they were, they are now sleeping. My Master, do You really not want to rest?»

«Do not insist, Martha. Before dawn they will be looking for Me here, at Gethsemane, at Johanna's, in every hospitable house. But at dawn I will be far away.»

«Where are You going, Master?» asks Lazarus.

«Towards Jericho, but not along the usual road... I am going towards Tekoa and then I will come back towards Jericho.»

«A hard journey in this season!...» whispers Martha.

«That is why the road is solitary. We will walk at night. The nights are clear even before the moon rises. And it is soon dawn...»

«And then?» asks Mary.

«And later beyond the Jordan. And at the height of northern Samaria, I will cross the river and come to this area.»

«Go to Nazareth soon. You are tired...» says Lazarus.

«I must go to the coast area first... Then... I will go to Galilee. But they will persecute Me even there...»

«You will always have Your Mother to comfort You...» says Mary.

«Yes, poor Mother!»

«Master, Magdala is Yours. You know» Mary reminds Him.

«I know, Mary. I am aware of all the good and of all the evil...»

«Separated thus!... for such a long time! Shall I still be alive, when You come back, Master?»

«Do not doubt it. Do not weep... We must get accustomed also to parting. Separations serve to test the strength of affections. The hearts we love are better

understood when we see them with spiritual eyes, from afar. When we are not enticed by the human pleasure of being physically close to the person we love, we can meditate on the spirit and love of that person... and have a better understanding of the ego of our far away beloved... I am sure that, thinking of your Master, you will understand Him better, when you see and contemplate My deeds and love peacefully.»

«Oh! Master! But we are not dubious of You!»

«Neither I am of you. I know. But you will know Me better. And I am not telling you to love Me, because I know your hearts. I say only: pray for Me.»

Lazarus and his sisters weep... Jesus is so sad!... How can one not weep?

«What do you want? God had put love amongst men. But men have substituted hatred... And hatred not only separates enemies from one another, but it insinuates itself to separate friends.»

There is a long silence.

Then Lazarus says: «Master, go away from Palestine for some time...»

«No. My place is here: to live, to evangelize, to die.»

«But You have seen to John and the Greek woman. Go and stay with them.»

«No. They were to be saved. *I must save*. And that is the difference that clarifies everything. *The altar is here, and the chair is here*. I cannot go elsewhere. In any case... do you think that would change what has been decided? No. Neither on the Earth nor in Heaven. It would only blemish the spiritual purity of the Messianic figure. I would be “the coward” who saves himself fleeing. I must set an example for the present and future generations that in the matters concerning God, in holy things, one must not be a coward...»

«You are right, Master» says Lazarus with a sigh...

And Martha, pushing the curtain aside, says: «You are right... It is getting dark... The sun has set...»

Mary weeps distressingly, as if that word had the power to crush her moral courage, which had so far confined her grief to silent tears. She is weeping more heartbrokenly than she did in the house of the Pharisee, when she implored the Saviour with her tears to forgive her...

«Why are you weeping thus?» asks Martha.

«Because you have spoken the truth, sister! There is no more sunshine... The Master is going away... There is no more sunshine for me... for us...» (1)

«Be good. I bless you and may My blessing remain with you. And now leave Me with Lazarus who is tired and needs calmness. Watching My friend I will rest. Provide for the apostles and ensure that they are ready for the hour of shadows...»

The women disciples withdraw and Jesus remains silent, engrossed in thought, sitting near His languishing friend, who happy for such closeness, falls asleep with a light smile on his face.

(1) Maria Valtorta, the author of this Work, in the last years of her life, when her mind seemed to be vacant and she spoke only a few words, now and again used to exclaim at any time of the day, and sometimes repeatedly: «Oh! How much sunshine there is here!» No one ever understood what she meant. Perhaps it is possible to conjecture the meaning in the light of the above exclamation of Mary Magdalene, for whom Jesus was the Sun.